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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[FOILED IN THE ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.]

TWO MARRIAGES.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THOMAS
NEA

Tonight was densely foggy, and it got worse every instant instead of better; it was a kind of thick, pea-soup atmosphere. The lamps at the sides of the street glimmered dimly, as seen through a double gauze veil; it was quite impossible to tell what streets they were passing through.

They appeared to be driving through a cloud, and how the cabman found his way seemed perfectly marvellous.

He continued going ahead for what seemed a sufficiently long time to have landed them at their destination, and Georgie imparted this idea to Miss Todd, who sat bolt upright on the opposite seat, with her hands in her muff, never once opening her lips.

"It's the fog," she returned, promptly. "He has to keep clear of the big thoroughfares, driving is that dangerous; and it's just as likely we won't be there for another twenty good minutes."

"Where are we now?" said Georgie, pushing down the glass and thrusting her head out into the moist air. "I can't make it out at all. The little I can see, it's a strange street. Oh! I wish we could get on! If I had had my wits about me I would have gone by the Underground. Was he very ill when left, Todd? Had the doctor come?"

"Well, he was not to say too bad; but Lady Fauny was in a fuss! You can't be too careful, she says, about other people's children, and she just packed me off for you. But I think, myself, that he was not at all so bad as she fancied. Anyway," consolingly, "he will be well before he's twice married!" she concluded, with a giggle. "Children are more tormented than they are worth. I'm glad I've none!"

There was a freedom about this speech that startled the hearer a little, but she was too much absorbed in her own anxieties to give it more than a passing thought.

And still they kept driving steadily on at a quick, decided jog-trot, as if both horse and man knew perfectly well what they were about, and were going to do it thoroughly.

At last the cab slackened, and they drew up at a pavement.

Ere they had scarcely stopped Mary Todd sprang out, whispered a word to the cabman, unseen by Georgie, and then went up some steps and rang the bell.

"Come," she said to her companion, "here we are; but we have to go in by the back door. There was no getting near the front; there had been an accident, and the crowd is so thick you could not get through them. Follow me," entering a perfectly dark, wide hall. "Just keep after me, upstairs."

It all seemed very queer to Georgie, but so many strange things had happened to her lately that she was not in a position to be surprised at anything, but groped her way firmly up the so-called back stairs.

The back stairs were carpeted, which, if she had not her mind wholly fastened on Alice at the moment, might have struck her as odd.

The second landing gained, Mary Todd found open a door, saying, "Here we are," and the door emitted such a flood of gaslight

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that Georgie's eyes were momentarily dazzled, and she hardly made out anything.

Then it burst upon her that she was not in the nursery at Queen Elizabeth's gardens, but in a strange house—in a great big drawing-room, furnished in a garish, showy manner, with cheap gilt and cheap mirrors, freely lit up by a big gaselier, and a roaring fire.

Before this fire lounged a man smoking, with both slippers feet upon the chimney-piece, and something to drink in a long tumbler in his hand.

As the door opened he turned his head round with a quick jerk, and revealed the bloated face of Peter.

"Ah!" he said, with a kind of sign of relief, now deliberately putting down the tumbler, removing his feet from their elevation, and standing up. "So you've brought her? What a clever little creature you are, to be sure. That notion of yours was a happy thought about the kid; it drew her, and no mistake;" addressing himself to the delighted Miss Todd, who accepted his compliments as her well-earned due, and, at the same time, with undoubted satisfaction.

"She gave no trouble, I will say that for her," she returned, "the very wind of the word about the boy was enough," tossing her muff upon the table as she spoke, and sitting down.

"You see I was the little boy that wanted you, my love!" said Peter, approaching the petrified Georgie, with a cigar between his fingers, and a hideous grin upon his face. "Welcome home, Mrs. Blaine—fairly caught this time, eh?" with a brutal chuckle.

"Oh! you wicked woman!" she gasped out at last, turning away from him towards Mary Todd, and speaking with quivering lips, and eyes like two flames; "are you not afraid that you will be struck down dead for all the lies you have told me this evening, and for having lured a helpless creature, who never did you a wrong, into what, but for one escape would be a living to torture? Believe me, Mary Todd," raising her arm with a gesture that struck awe into the little soubrette, "an acre as you and I stand here you will live to rue this day—you will be punished for this, aye, bitterly punished. As for you, Peter Blaine," flinging fiercely on him—"you forger, swindler—you loathsome wretch!—who have less notion of honour and principle than a dog—do you think that I will live with you? No," rushing to the window and tearing back the curtains and seizing the sash, "I will kill myself first."

But Peter was too quick for her. He dashed at her, snatched her by her arm, and dragged her back by main force, driving his nails into her very flesh; but she made no outcry, though his grip was agony—she merely gazed into his cruel bloodshot eyes with a face of desperate, white defiance.

"It's manners to wait till you are asked," he said, giving her a shake that almost made the teeth in her head rattle. "Do you think I want your company, you wild cat—you she-bend? Not I, it's your money—my money that I must and will have—that's metal more attractive to me."

"Then take it all and let me go."

"No, my beauty. I'll take it all, and no thanks to you, and not let you go. You are too dangerous a young person to have at large. We might be having another adventure, such as your last with Mr. Vernon. I have a little respect for my good name," with a sneer.

"Your good name!" she scoffed, with a scorn that no pen could convey; "your bad name you mean—the wretched name of Blaine. I am sorry for it. How you have dragged it through the mud in Europe, Africa, and America——"

"Go on, m'man, go on—very fine indeed. You'd make a first-rate actress, I can see that," broke in Peter, with ferocious pleasure. "Encore!—bravo!"

"You are a convicted card-sharper, the very lowest shun you—you are even too bad for

them! You pledged your word and honour—what a pledge!—and break both next day. You guaranteed to leave me my freedom for so much, and then, when the coast is clear, intrigue with Miss Fane—yes, I know it was her—and decoy me, and carry me off, to wring more money from me. I did not know what I was doing that foolish day nine years ago—I little dreamt that I was marrying—"

"Will you hold your" (bore many horrid words) "tongue, m'am? Just don't go too far," approaching nearer to her, for for the last few minutes the table had been between them, whilst Mary Todd sat on a chair, with her back to the wall and her hat in her lap, and looked on as eagerly as if this was a real piece of acting on the stage. She adored the theatre, and certainly Mrs. George was splendid! Who would have believed, to see her every day, she would dare to look and speak like that? As an actress she was inclined to pat her on the back, but as a real everyday woman, who was to live upstairs in those too back rooms, and that she was to look after, she was not at all sure that she was not a bit afraid of her.

"I little dreamt that I was marrying," repeated Georgie, undaunted, and with still greater emphasis, "a sneak, a coward, and a brute!"

The answer to this was a knock-down argument in short, a heavy blow across the mouth, that made her stagger back two paces, her lip bleeding blood from where Mr. Blaine's ring had made a deep cut just underneath it, and of which he bore the scar for life!

"Do you would have it, would you?" he said, squaring towards her, strongly, but secretly a little ashamed of what he had done.

He might, when in a bad humour, strike Mary Todd, and knock her about; she only whimpered and cried, and then fawned on him afterwards, like a dog that has been beaten; but it was, he could see, a different thing, to strike a lady; and he had hit her for the moment.

"Remember how ghastly white she looked! But the fire in her dark grey eyes was unquenched yet. She looked at him with pallid scorn, but she said nothing, merely pulled out her handkerchief and tried to staunch her lip, and sat down, her eyes all the time flashing hatred and defiance into his, like some dumb creature at bay.

"Oh! I say!" was all Miss Todd had ejaculated, as she witnessed this climax to the scene.

"Do you want another, do you?" he demanded, ferociously. "I'm quite ready for you if I have any more of your lies and abuse. I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself. Why a Billinggate fishwoman was nowhere set alongside of you." A pause, and then, "Ah! I thought I'd shot you up!"

"You have not! You never will!" she retorted. "As long as I have breath to speak I will denounce you—you mercenary, wicked wretch. You have deprived me of my husband, and in the sight of Heaven he was and is my husband, and as such I will regard him as long as I live!" Here a gush of blood stopped her speech for a second, and then she went on.

"You have deprived me of husband, and children, and friends, of as much money as you could get, until now when you would strip me of all, and I see that you are bent on having my life as well. Take it! it's not worth much!—and once I am dead, you," wedging her head towards him, gravely, "will have good reason to regret me, for you will again be a beggar!"

"I am your heir!" he shouted, triumphantly.

"If I die without a will. My will, I am thankful to say, is made, and in the hands of my solicitors!"

At this intelligence Peter started; it was an unexpected piece of news.

"Well, well," he said, renewing the attack once more; "you are a fine strong young

woman, years younger than I am. I don't wish to hurry you, nor kill my goose that lays the golden eggs! Mary," turning to Miss Todd, "she's bleeding like a pig; run and get a towel, or something."

But ere she had time to leave the room a muffled plunge upon the floor made her look back; Mrs. George had tumbled right off her chair, and lay flat on the carpet, in a dead faint.

"It's the best thing could happen," said Peter, promptly; "we will have no more trouble with her! Just you open the door, and clear out of the way, and I'll carry her up to her room, and leave her there. Don't let Emma see her. She'll be all right, and as meek as a mouse to-morrow morning; that fury she was in was just a flash-in-the-pan, and no more!"

Sosaying, he deposited her on a narrow, little iron cot in a big, poorly-furnished back bedroom, and went downstairs, muttering something incoherent about women being the deuce to manage—brandy-and-water—and grilled bones.

It was a long time before Mrs. George came back to consciousness, but at length she did, with a series of faint sighs, followed by quick, gasping shudders. She opened her eyes very cautiously, as if half afraid of what they would reveal, and met Miss Todd's poising black orbs point-blank, staring down into her grey eyes.

"I must put a bit of plaster on you, m'am. He's awful when he is in a rage," in a half-apologetic tone.

"Where am I? Am I to stay here?" said Georgie, leaning upon her elbow, and looking anxiously round this strange apartment.

"You're in the back bedroom, third floor. You are to have the whole of this floor to yourself—no one else."

"For what? Not to live in?" incredulously.

"Yes, and they are not so bad in the daytime."

"And what are you doing here?" she next inquired of her companion.

"I'm—I'm here to attend to you," she replied, not meeting her new mistress's searching eyes.

"Pray—pray, Mary Todd," now sitting up quite erect, and putting up her hands; "don't tell me any more lies. You have seen with your own eyes what you have brought me to. Where I was, was desolate and lonely, but it was heaven to this. If you have one spark of womanhood in your breast—if you have one grain of human nature in your composition—help me to get away. I will pay you well, and keep my promises. I will make you a rich woman—only help me to hide from him."

"I can promise you nothing yet," said Mary, evasively; "and Mr. Blaine ain't a man to be trifled with. Little—little guessed that time I was at the Manor, and that you were passing as Miss Gray, you were his wife, though I saw his photo in your locket."

"Yes, and tore it to pieces," put in Georgie, feeling now rather grateful to her for the deed. "It was you who did that!"

"He used to be a great ladies' man, I know, but I thought it was just one of his fancies. He don't care for you"—impressively—"he don't like you, and after the awful row and terrible way you went on at him to-night, I expect he will hate you pretty well. I can tell you nothing for your comfort—give him what money he asks, and he will never cross your threshold. All he wants is money," and as it fell to her, "he do spend a power. I can't think where it all goes to. Now just let me take off your clothes and lie down, and try and content yourself—what can't be cured must be endured," in a soothing voice.

"I won't endure it!" cried the other, fiercely, "that's all about it. I do not require your services, and as this is supposed to be my room, as I understand, I shall be glad to have it to myself."

"Ob, very well, very well,"—stifly—"I only

meant civility, nothing else. I'm not going to speak myself where I'm not wanted. I'll bring your breakfast up at nine to-morrow, and bid you good night, Mrs. Blaine."

So saying she stalked across to the door, opened it, slammed it, and locked it audibly on the outside, leaving Mrs. Blaine seated on the side of the bed, looking the very picture of misery and despair.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Georgie sat for a long time motionless on the edge of her bed, and then, at last completely worn out with fatigues of mind and body, she fell back, dressed as she was, in a kind of stupor, and there remained till the tardy winter dawn began to creep in under the shutters; and she rose stiffly enough, unfastened these shutters, and looked out upon a new view—the backs of many houses, and the scenery afforded by a few square, walled-in enclosures, called by courtesy "gardens." One of such lay just below her, boasting a round glass plot, a few blackened shrubs against the walls, and a circumnavigating walk all round.

She undressed and dressed, and was absolutely, low as she was in her mind, shocked and appalled at her own reflection in the glass.

Hollow cheeks and sunken eyes and a pale, shrivelled-looking skin were and could be spared, but about her mouth?

She actually blushed as she looked at the marks of the blow. What degradation to have been struck by a man, and such a man!

All below her lip was bruised dreadfully, and her under lip painfully swollen. She would be ashamed for anyone to see her, even Mary Todd.

As she was thinking of this medea Sappho a knock and a rattling of teathings announced that she was on the landing, and so presently entered, looking down and madden thoughts.

"Any port in a storm. She must make ventrises to this young woman?" she said to herself, "if she would ever get away from this hateful house."

Luckily she had a good sum of money sewed inside the body of her dress. Surely Mary Todd could be corrupted?

"Mary," she said, at once, "I wonder that having known me so long, you could turn against me for nothing, and make yourself my jailer in this way! What have I ever done to deserve this at your hands?"

Mary made no reply beyond a noisy setting out of the small round table in the sitting-room, then she knelt down with her back to her mistress and began to light the fire.

"I will freely forgive you everything, Mary," said that lady, coming and standing over her, "if you will help me to get away."

"No answer."

"Will you even promise to post a letter for me, Mary?"

"Aye. I don't mind doing that," without turning her head.

"And you won't play me false this time? Oh! Mary, you have deceived me so terribly already; but I have no one to rely on but you! May I trust you?" imploringly. "It is life or death to me!"

"Yes," still poking away with chips and matches, "you may trust me. When will your letter be ready?"

"In half an hour, or sooner. The quicker goes the better."

"And what will I do if Mr. Blaine catches me?"

"He won't—he can't. From what I remember of him he is not up yet; and, Mary, here you must help me to get away. The way he gives you are nothing—a mere drop in the ocean—to what you will gain by abandoning me. I suppose at most you make twenty pounds a year?"

"Aye, I've that," smiling to herself, unseen by her companion.

"I will pension you for life at ten times the sum the day I get clear away, and for ever, from Mr. Blaine. You'll think of it, Mary, won't you, Mary?"

"Yes, man," now backing towards the door with a curious twinkle in her eye, "you may be sure that I'll think of it; and do mind and take some breakfast," with unfeigned anxiety in her voice. "Eat hearty; for you do look bad!" It would never pay if she were to die.

"Eat!—how can I?" putting her hand to her lip.

"Aye, dear me! A man, and I will say it, has no right to strike a woman, though you did give him great provocation last night; that I will say!"

"Provocation!" in a tone of indignant amazement. "I did not say quarter enough, that was all. I only wish I had said ten times more. Mary Todd, you poor, silly, young woman, as I was once, you little know him!"

"Oh! don't I," thought Miss Todd, with an inward smile. "Well, anyhow, I must be going now," she added, aloud. "I'll see what I can do with it."

So saying, she went out, and again turned the key in the door. The door was not part of the room, but one on the landing, that shut these back apartments in from the rest of the house, as if it were a kind of flat, and wholly apart.

Georgie wrote her letter—it was to Gilbert's Club, with "urgent—to be forwarded" underlined on the outside.

This missive Miss Todd bore away when she came for the breakfast things, promising solemnly, as it were, by bell, book, and candle, that she would post it with her own hands. She did nothing of the sort, of course. She tore it open ere she had reached the first landing, read it with a laugh, and threw it into the drawing-room fire.

The day went by very slowly for the prisoner above, who had nothing whatever to do but enjoy the company of her own painful, maddening thoughts.

She had spent an hour in making an exhaustive examination of her rooms to see if there was the smallest prospect of getting out of them except by that heavy-barred door on the landing.

There was none. Every precaution had been taken, and that not very recently. There were heavy iron bars across the windows, heavy bolts on the doors—it was a regular fortress in its way.

She mentioned something of this to Mary when she brought her dinner, a welcome break in the afternoon; also a small portmanteau of her clothes, but her diamonds and everything of any special value in the way of garments had been eliminated.

"A strong room, all bars and bolts, you say. Aye, so it is. It's one reason why Mr. Blaine fancied the house. These three rooms were lived in for years by a mad lady and her attendant. She was very rich, and her people did not like sending her out to an asylum, so they just got a kind of one made up here on the premises. The people at the back used to see her gibbering at the window for many years. That inner, empty room beyond, that's got nothing in it but boxes—you may have looked in?"

"Yes, I saw it."

Had she not closely examined every hole and corner with microscopic care?

"Then, maybe you noticed the marks on the walls where the padding used to be? That was the padded room, where they put her in when she was too outrageous. The padding has been taken down."

"And you took it down, thinking it would not be required for me," interpolated Georgie, pacing the room with her hands behind her back. "And these three rooms were the chief attraction the house offered to Mr. Blaine! A nice, safe private prison, where he could stow me away unknown, and I, wretched woman, have taken such pains to conceal my whereabouts from all! I have

played into his hands. No one will ever be able to find me if you have played me false," stopping suddenly and looking hard at Mary Todd. "You posted my letter?"

"I play you false? I not post it?" in a tone of the most virtuous repudiation. "Do I look that sort of person? Come, now!"

Her stare was so bold and so brazen that the other felt obliged to look away, and once more began her walk.

"And the old mad lady—what was the end of her?" she asked, presently.

"Oh, she made away with herself in the end."

"How? What do you mean?" pausing in her tramp.

"I mean that one day she had been very peaceable and quiet, and as meek as a mouse. Her attendant, or mad nurse, or whatever she was called, went down to her tea, and when she came back there was the old woman hanging stone dead out of a hook high up in the wall. She hanged herself with the bell-ropes. It's dangerous to leave bell-ropes handy for the like of them!"

"How horrible!" ejaculated the new-tenant of the rooms, with a shudder. "I wish you had not told me."

"Oh, I'm sure you are not superstitions, ma'am, like poor ignorant creatures that know no better."

"No, I'm not that; but all the same, it makes these hateful rooms seem worse than ever."

"Of course," proceeded Miss Todd, making a feint of dusting the furniture. "They say she walks, and that was the reason that the house stood empty for so long, and is let so cheap. It's a splendid house—quite a mansion, I can tell you."

"And where is it—in what street?" inquired Georgie, eagerly.

"Ah, that would be telling! I cannot go so far as that, but I may tell you this much—that people has been heard to swear as they saw in the half-twilight in yonder room, just about dusk, the figure of a woman hanging with her head down and her arms by her sides, swaying about quite distinct—like this," making a motion with her own arms.

"I told you not to tell me these things," said Georgie, turning pale. "I—I believe you did it on purpose!"

"Some folks likes to listen to these stories—some folks don't," said the other, now calmly folding up the tablecloth. "It's all a matter of taste. I'm not afraid of ghosts myself."

So saying she departed, carrying the tray, and, as usual, looking the door.

For a whole month Georgie remained there a prisoner, never seeing anyone but Mary Todd, who evidently was tiring of her task of jailer, and often forgot the unlucky prisoner for half a day—forget her fire, her dinner, or, as the case might be, and what to Georgie was far worse, her lights.

Sitting alone in those hateful, silent rooms, watching darkness descend, those February days, first coming in and dimly veiling far corners, then it came closer and closer, whilst Georgie, ashamed of her own fears, would open the window, regardless of rain or snow, and lean out.

In the lights of the back windows of the surrounding houses was company—better company than that awful, mysterious blackness behind her.

The creaking of a door, the rattle of a mouse in the old panels, brought her heart to her mouth and a flood of fire to her face.

When the tardy candle did arrive her own appearance had startled Miss Todd, and she would sometimes come down, and in an awestruck voice announce to Mr. Blaine that "it would never surprise her one bit if she was going in the head."

To this he would mutter the amiable but laconic reply,—

"So best!"

It was enough to affect any one's nerves, if

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not their mind, this close confinement, without any occupation, this being in perfect health, cut off from all human intercourse, save with one, this being buried alive in a living grave, lost to all one's belongings as utterly as they were lost to her!

She had not even hope to live upon. The letter, she was now certain, had never gone beyond the fire downstairs, for by words and looks let fall she could see that Mary Todd was in league against her, and a devoted ally to Peter Blaine.

"Of course, I might have known it, when Grace said she was the only creature he ever loved! Perhaps in a kind of way he loves her still! I shall talk to her no longer."

This was Georgie's resolution, taken and kept resolutely, after an imprisonment of some weeks. She now never opened her lips, much to Miss Todd's amazement.

No longer were there agonised prayers for news of her children, for even one—one word to say they were well! No longer tears and bribes to post letters—no longer wild intercessions to be set free. No, nothing now, but a sullen, frozen silence.

Mr. Blaine never appeared, but he wrote fierce demands for money, cheques to be signed, a power-of-attorney to receive all payments.

At first Georgie firmly refused to put her pen to paper, but after a time, being mentally worn down by silence, solitude, sleepless nights, and weary blank days, and being, beyond all, terrified by his threat that he was "coming up himself, and gave her just ten minutes' time to think better of it," she, urged to madness almost by the wily Mary, dashed her signature across the paper, and in so doing made over to her master the full power of dealing with her yearly income—which was all he wanted.

"He has got my money now," she said to herself, "and surely he will let me go."

But this was a foolish idea on her part. A victim once seized—upon by those terrible talons did not so easily escape.

She wrote him a letter of entreaty. It received no answer. Again she wrote—no reply. A third time and last on half a sheet of paper,—

"Then at least send me some books and work, or I shall go mad."

This came back—her own missive—as she had sent it, only scrawled underneath in pencil, in his handwriting, were the words,—

"Then, go mad!"—P.B.

She spent now a great deal of her time looking out of her prison windows, trying to make signals to people opposite and below her, but they seemed to have too much to do to notice her as she sat there idle from morning till sunset, and a kind of screen had been raised at either side of the casement to conceal her from her neighbours next door.

Perhaps the old mad lady had been given to making signals too?

No one ever seemed to look up at her window. She was never—never once rewarded for her long hours of watching, and at times she gave way to wild paroxysms of despair and bitter, unavailing weeping.

One morning a new face appeared with the breakfast-tray. This was a heavy-looking, stout country girl, with a short, thick figure, red arms, and her hair, cut short, underneath a white muslin cap.

Surely she would be more amenable than Mary; she would surely understand the charms of money, and, luckily for herself, Georgie had a good supply in notes and gold, prepared for her original flight.

She must proceed warily, and make her overtures by degrees; she must not spoil her chances by being too precipitate; she must try and make friends with this woman, with the log-like face, but, alas! for her plans!—alas for her prospects of escape—her new keeper turned out to be deaf and dumb!—otherwise an excellent servant.

She never forgot her charge; she swept and dusted *con amore*, and gave the rooms a

thorough "doing out," which they certainly wanted badly, for Miss Todd was a mere amateur; but she took no more notice of their inmate than if she were a child—and, indeed, perhaps not so much, and to all her signals and signs she was both figuratively and literally deaf and dumb. To tamper with her with bribery and corruption was hopeless.

One day Georgie, whom she had discovered in floods of tears, pointed to herself, to the door, and, going quickly to her table drawer, held out some savings.

The dummy calmly took them and looked at them, tied them most deliberately up in the corner of her handkerchief, and solemnly walked away, shaking her head all the time, Georgie left sitting absolutely aghast at such unprincipled behaviour.

But the five sovereigns bore some fruit after a time. A day or two later she mysteriously produced from under her apron a huge hunk of worsted, a set of knitting needles, two or three venerable newspapers, *Ruff's Sporting Guide*, and a *Bradshaw*, probably cribbed from downstairs, from which regions latterly the sounds, even through thick doors, ascended to Georgie's prison, the "sounds of revelry by night"—songs, shouts, and loud uproarious peals of laughter.

Georgie eagerly clutched the wool, needles, and papers, and smiled her thanks with all her might.

Gratitude in her case was decidedly evinced with regard to favours to come. After this the dummy brought her more papers, candles, work, and things were not quite so bad as they had been hitherto.

No more idle hands, no more horrible darkness, no more of being a prey to icy, creeping terrors! Now she could light up at the first signs of dusk.

She had one short fierce note from Mr. Blaine demanding the proofs of which she had spoken, and which he seemed suddenly to have recollect, and she took a leaf out of his own book on this occasion by putting his letter in the fire, and sending no answer. It was a foolish proceeding, for her silence merely procured her a personal interview with Peter.

About seven o'clock one evening the outer door was flung open, the little passage resounded to man's step, and her *bûche noire* strode in.

"Now, then!" he roared, "what's the meaning of your impudence? Why don't you answer my questions, eh? Where is that that you bragged of, eh? Out with it!" We omit his bad language.

Georgie made no answer, but sat and looked at him gravely between the two candles. He had been drinking—that was very plain. He swayed backwards and forwards as he steadied himself at the table by both hands, and swore a string of frightful oaths.

A sudden thought flashed through her brain like lightning. *He had left the door open!*

She rose quickly, and pointed towards the furthest corner of the room, as if to divert his attention, and whilst his eyes followed the direction indicated, she made one frenzied dash for freedom.

But, alas! it was not to be! Ere she reached the stairhead he had caught her. One piercing shriek echoed through the house of "Help, help!" and then there was a slamming of doors, and the dummy, who was on the landing, was in time to see Mr. Blaine take the unknown lady, who clung frantically to the balustrades, by the throat, half choke her against the wall, then fling her bodily with a great crash inside the outer door, slam it, lock it, and stagger downstairs.

CHAPTER XXIX.

For a long time Georgie lay on the floor half-stunned; then she gradually came to herself, rose, bathed her face, and tried to cool her throbbing temples. She now went in bodily fear of her life of Peter, who, when

half-maddened with rage and drink, was apparently capable of anything. He might kill her, and who would ever know? The Dummy and Mary would keep his secret.

She wished there were an end of this life, and that she were dead—but, oh! by a natural death—not to have her soul parted from her body by strangulation at Peter's hands, and death had seemed very close to her that very night on the stairs, when his fingers were at her throat, and his eyes glaring into hers, like a veritable wild beast of prey.

It would come to pass, she foresaw, that he would wring her secret from her, as he had wrung her money, by threats and force. One thing was certain, she had none of the papers about her. Would he believe this? He might search and search till he did believe. For a reason she could not clearly account for at the time she had put them all away into the secret drawer of the fateful, hateful black cabinet—partly because they would be safe, and partly because there was to her a fitness in this detested cabinet holding this disgraceful secret. Well, if Peter Blaine wanted certain compromising papers, he would have to go to the Manor to fetch them, that was all.

Meanwhile every sound on the stairs made her start and shudder, and it seemed to her ears, sharpened by fear, that there was someone—some stealthy person—at the other side of the door on the landing. She went to the door of the room and listened. Someone was there. Then she, panting with fear, drew with great labour a heavy chest of drawers all the way across two rooms, spurred by an agony of dread, and placed it against the door, on the top of that the coalscuttle, fender, and, in short, a goodly portion of all the portable things in the room, and thereby made a formidable barricade, and then she went to bed, and lay awake all night, protected by four candles.

Towards morning she fell into a fitful sleep, from which the thundering of the dummy to obtain admittance aroused her. The dummy must enter, otherwise she would have to starve, and a cup of tea she longed for, with a longing well-known to those who have spent a wakeful, feverish night.

The process of taking down the barricade occupied a considerable time, and when the dummy made her way in, her stolid face actually, for once in its life, expressed astonishment—aye, and more, for when she had tidied up the apartment, and stowed away all the articles each in their proper place, and when she had made the fire and laid the breakfast, she went and peeped in at the bedroom door, which was ajar, and stared with a mixture of curiosity and pity—or something near to pity—at this tall young woman, in the long white dressing-gown, who was mechanically brushing out her profusion of brown hair, unknowing that she was watched.

As her arm rose and fell, and her white sleeves fell back, the marks of a large bruise was visible on one of them—a very recent, black bruise. The glass reflected her peering face in the doorway, for she had pushed it further open, and she was beckoned in.

She came slowly, and then, stopping pointed with one finger to the mark on Georgie's arm—never had she been moved to such an extent before. For reply, Georgie pointed down through the floor, as though to indicate who had done it. At this the Dummy nodded, her mind had grasped that, and she looked with intelligence for more information.

Georgie now pointed to her wedding-ring and again below, but this was altogether too much for the woman's credulity. She smiled—she even made a curious gurgling noise in her throat, that, perhaps, stood for a laugh with her—and, shaking her head very slowly from side to side, she beat a solemn retreat. Evidently to try and persuade her that her charge was the wife of the master of the house was making too great a demand upon her credulity—it actually made her laugh.

Feb. 28, 1885.

THE LONDON READER.

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At this particular crisis of the story the state of affairs was as follows:—Lady Fanny Barton was satisfied that her incubus Mrs. George had disappeared, to bloom out as Mrs. Blaine, and wrote a triumphant letter to her absent nephew to that effect. It ran as follows:—

DEAR GILBERT,—

"Your short note from Singapore was hardly worth the postage. However, I am thankful to hear that you are well. The children are in good health, and, I may say, growing visibly. And now let me communicate a great piece of news, that will surprise you, perhaps, though I must say that it did not surprise me. Their mother, after coming home constantly for the last ten months, and making the most absurd fuss about them, has, without even giving us a hint of her movements, suddenly disappeared with Mr. Blaine. It happened that I had occasion to send her a message by the nurse, and she found that Mr. Bower was in the house agent's hands—was taking the inventory, the servants preparing to leave; and when she inquired what had become of the lady of the house, Mr. Blaine himself came forward, and announced that she had seen fit to return to his care, and requested that her address would not be revealed to friends who had known her in other circumstances.

"Since this astonishing intelligence nothing has been heard of her. She is gone. She is, I am happy to say, cast off what she so cleverly calls 'her former friends.' We need no longer trouble ourselves about her, and I look upon her unexpected removal as a very great blessing to me, to the boys, and to you. Now, my dear Gilbert, come home; surely you have seen enough of the world by this time? Come home soon to your attached and thankful aunt,"

FRANCES BARTON."

This was Lady Fanny's opinion of the matter. Miss Fane had outwardly the same view—i.e., that Mrs. George was a deceitful, heartless creature, and that she had acted just as such a woman would be supposed to act. Having found that Gilbert was gone for ever she fell back upon Mr. Blaine, &c., &c., and she was a good riddance to everyone concerned; and she hoped that Gilbert had had enough of scheming girls, with good eyes and figures, and would profit by past experience, and accept it as a lesson for life (all this to her aunt). Secretly Miss Fane had had some twinges from her almost ossified conscience. However, her hand in so violating the Blaines, the flattered herself, would never, never come to light.

As for the Vances, they took no interest of a friendly nature in a relative who had robbed them, so they declared, of an immense fortune. She was capable of anything (bad), to quote her cousins, and when it came to their ears that the Manor was shut up, Mr. Vernon was abroad, and Mr. Vernon gone no one knew where, they simply lifted their shoulders and their eyebrows, and asked, "What any- one could expect from such an abominable creature?"

Then Charlotte was in an up-country station in New Zealand, and wrote home rarely—say once a year. All her hopes, all her heart was centred in the colony. She did not trouble her heart about her friends or her sister in the old country.

Madame Smart had been puzzled—very much so indeed; for when she came to execute her client's orders she discovered that someone had been beforehand with her, and all the transactions taken out of her hands. In her amazement she sent for Binks, and cross-questioned her sharply.

"No; she knew nothing of Mr. George's whereabouts, she only wished she did. She knew of Mr. Blaine's visit of the horror Mrs. George had of him, of how she had told her she was going to run away," all this she breathlessly explained to Madame Smart, who sat with her hands on her knees, in a

majestic attitude, her lower jaw dropped half-an-inch in sheer amazement.

"Well, well—and she wasn't leaving till next morning?"

"No; but a cab came for her about eight o'clock, and a young woman she knew in it."

"Knew her, did she?"

"Yes, and she brought a message to say that one of the boys was took ill with cramp, and she was wanted at once. So off she set, never even stopping for gloves or boots—just threw on her jacket and hat, and away with her in the cab with the young person. It was a desperate foggy night—the lamps as dim as dim could be; and when she got to the gate she turns and says to me, and her face looking quite strange and pale in the bad light, 'Good-bye, Binks; maybe I'll not come back again, but I'll send for my things,' and with that she slipped into the cab and drove away into the fog. I stood for a while, and I had a queer kind of feeling that there was something not all right about it."

"What made you think that?" quickly.

"It was a look in the girl's eyes—aye, she had a bad eye."

"But did she not seem friendly with Mrs. George, and did she not go with her of her own accord, readily?"

"Oh, yes, ready enough—toe ready, I'm thinking!"

"And did she send for her things?"

"Yes, the very self same young woman came and carried them all away next day—everything, even to a few little odds-and-ends that I know Mrs. George meant for you and me," with an angry recollection of her loss.

"And what did this woman say?"

"Well, when I asked her she said Mrs. George was well and happy, and said I was to send her all her things—that was all!" she returned, reluctantly. "Then when the nurse came from Lady Fanny, and said she had never been near them at all that night, I did not like the look of it, I can tell you."

"Still," persisted Madame Smart, "you say she and the girl were friends, and she went away with her on the spot, and said she would not come back, but would send for her clothes. She kept her word exactly, you see—she did not come back; she did send for her clothes, and the very same girl. What more would you have?"

"Ah, but then Mr. Blaine came. I think he and that impudent-looking, black-eyed minx were in league; and all I pray to Heaven is that that poor young lady has come to no harm; but it's a strange business, and I can't help feeling a worry over it in my own inner mind. That poor Mrs. George! I shan't forget her face as she said good-bye. I often seem to see it before me now, as if she were trying—trying to say something to me, and could not. 'Maybe,' lowering her voice to a whisper, 'they have made away with her?'

"Get out with your nonsense, Susan Binks! Your head is just full of rubbish and fancies, and you have got the nerves, as I call it, from reading up police reports, which is no fit kind of amusement for such as you. Don't talk any more trash to me. I daresay before the month is over our heads we will be having her here, getting her spring dresses."

But a month went by—two months—three months—and she did not reappear, nor was there any tidings of her from any source whatever. Mrs. George had sunk beneath the social surface. She had completely and mysteriously vanished.

(To be continued.)

CURIOS MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.

Among the Kalmucks the bride-race is reduced to a match, and Dr. Clarke avers that the girls are such good horsewomen that for one to be caught against her will was an unusual thing. Kalmucks of high degree do not run their brides down; they bargain for

them, and, the bargain concluded, the bride-groom and chief men of the tribe ride to the camp of the bride's people, who feign opposition to the match, and only surrender the lady after a mock conflict. Sometimes the conflict is real enough. If the lover hasn't money enough to satisfy the demands of the bride's parents, or is for any other reason obnoxious to them, he enlists the aid of his kinsmen, who come down on the adverse camp, and, providing they don't get the worst of the fight, carry the prize to the expectant lover.

In Circassia the carrying off of the bride is a pre-arranged affair, the bridegroom and his friends going into the bride's house while the wedding revelries are at their height, and bearing the reluctant damsel off with them. Against such an intrusion the Indian Mussulman provides by closing the entrances to the lady's abode and setting a guard before it to receive the expectant assailants.

"Who are you who dare to obstruct the king's cavalcade?" demands the leader of the wife-seeking band.

"There are thieves abroad at night; possibly we behold them," is the reply.

A long interchange of uncomplimentary badinage ensues, terminating in an attempt to break through the ranks of the bride's defenders. Falling in this, the bridegroom pays down a certain sum of money, and the gates are flung open. There is a second contest, ending in the delivering up of the maiden to the victors.

The Khords have turned marriage from comedy into farce. Riding one night among the hills an English officer heard loud cries, seemingly proceeding from a village hard by. Making for the spot he saw a man carrying upon his back something enveloped in a scarlet cloth. He was surrounded by twenty or thirty young men, who had all they could do to protect him from the desperate assaults of a number of girls. The man had just been married, and was going home with his bride; and not until he was within the boundaries of his own cottage did his fair tormentors cease hurling stones at him, as he and they ran towards their harshest.

The mock battle forms part of the marriage ceremonies of the Kookies, but with them the bride's party has the best of it. After the purchase-money has been paid the friends of the bride-buyer essay to fetch her in and get well thrashed for their pains, but finally the girl is brought out, conducted to the cottage gate and given up. Among the Garrows of Bengal the positions of the parties to the marriage are reversed. It is for the man to feign unwillingness to enter into the bonds of matrimony. It is for the lady to do the courting. When she has brought matters to a hoped-for climax she fixes the fatal day and bids her friends come and make merry with her. The feast finished, the guests bear the hostess to the river and give her a bath. Then a move is made for the happy man. Seeing the advancing procession he pretends to hide, but soon suffers himself to be caught, carried to the river, and dipped in. The parents, setting up a dismal bawling, declare they will not part with their beloved son. A scramble ensues, and they are overcome; a cock and a hen are sacrificed and the pair are man and wife.

The Berriores of France are the only European people among whom the form of capture still survives. Upon the day of a wedding the doors of a bride's house are closed and barricaded, and her friends muster within. Presently the party of the bridegroom comes, asking admission on one pretence after another. Finding speech of no use they endeavour to force an entrance, with no better fortune. Then comes a parley; the besiegers proclaim that they bring the lady a husband, and are admitted within doors to fight for the possession of the heart, win it and the bride with it, the couple becoming forthwith united in the orthodox and civilised fashion.

Feb. 28, 1885.

SINNED AGAINST.

CHAPTER III.

Dr. West had known Basil St. John more intimately than many of his friends, and the good physician spent several hours in arranging matters for the benefit of his orphan child.

He knew, as did all the world, that the title descended on a distant cousin—a young lawyer, who was already making for himself a name in his profession, but he really had no idea whether Alix had any kindred able and willing to take care of her. He was unfeignedly relieved when Mrs. Lacy arrived—a pleasant and intelligent-looking woman, who having saved sufficient for her modest wants, had now retired from the arduous duties of teaching.

"I am quite sure there are no relations except Mr. Stuart St. John," she said, positively. "Lady St. John was bitterly disappointed she had no son. Again and again I have heard her lament that a stranger should be her husband's heir."

"Heir to the title," commented the doctor; "everything else can descend in the female line, fortunately for Alix."

"Poor child!"

"Aye, doubly orphaned in one day."

"And left the richest heiress in London. It would be romantic if she married her cousin, and they united the property and title."

"That won't be. Miss St. John has lost her heart already—more's the pity."

"You mean she's engaged?"

"As far as she is concerned; her father had not actually given his consent."

"Who is it?"

"Sir Clarence Manners."

The widow started.

"You are like me," said the doctor, quietly.

"You don't like him?"

"I have no cause."

"What do you mean?"

"I had a niece, the sweetest, prettiest girl you ever saw. Sir Clarence met her abroad, won her love—and broke her heart."

"Ah, I'm not surprised. But Alix is an heiress, you see, so he'll keep faithful to her."

Meanwhile the heiress was sleeping that heavy, dreamless slumber which often follows great mental fatigue. When she awoke the June sunshine was pouring into the room, and Mrs. Lacy was sitting by her bedside; one look at her friend's face, and memory returned. Alix gave one little sob.

"Is it quite true?"

"Quite; my darling Alix, be brave. Remember how they loved each other—think they are spared the misery of parting."

"But I am all alone. I have lost them both in one day. Oh! Mrs. Lacy, how can I bear it?"

And then her thoughts fled to something else that happened yesterday, and a faint rose-coloured flush shone on her cheeks.

After all she was not quite alone; there would be someone to share her sorrows and dry her tears. While Clarence loved her she could not be quite miserable.

"You will stay with me?" she said, touching Mrs. Lacy's hand appealingly. "Oh, don't leave me alone in my misery."

"I will stay as long as you want me. I don't think I could bear to leave you. Dr. West asked me last night if there was anyone he could send for, but I told him I believed you had no relations save the new lord."

"Don't call him that," said Alix, sharply. "It is all too soon—how he will gloat over my misery!"

"My dear!"

"He never liked papa. He never came near us since I can remember."

"I thought the estrangement was mutual?"

Alix shook her head.

"He is papa's own cousin. Papa and his brother were great friends always, but this

man disliked us always. I think mamma never quite forgave me for not being a boy."

They persuaded Alix to get up, and dressed her in a soft, white dress and black ribbons—it seemed the garb fittest for her until all the paraphernalia of woe could be provided. She was lying on the couch in her own bedroom when the butler brought up a card.

"Lady Manners is here, madam. She would take no denial. She seemed positive that you would see her."

Alix coloured.

"Ask her to come up."

Then, as the man departed, she turned to Mrs. Lacy. "Don't leave me alone with her; she frightens me always."

Another moment, and a handsome, stately dowager, with the remains of great beauty, entered the boudoir; she kissed Miss St. John rather rigidly, and looked askance at her companion.

Alix introduced Mrs. Lacy in trembling tones, and then leant back on her cushions, wondering vaguely what she could say to this proud matron, who inspired her with so much awe, and yet must one day be her mother-in-law.

To her surprise Lady Manners made no allusion to the engagement; indeed, she never mentioned her son's name. She had come at his earnest request, but she was deadly averse to the errand. Miss St. John might be a beauty and an heiress, but she was not the wife his mother would have chosen for Clarence.

"A woman will never keep his love unless he has some trouble in winning her," was the widow's estimate of her son's character. "As to this child, with her baby face, he will tire of her in a month."

Sir Clarence himself came in the afternoon, and was allowed to have a private interview, with his betrothed. He took her in his arms, and told her she must bear up for his sake; and then, as she grew calmer, he told her fondly she belonged to him now there was no one in the world to stand between them.

"You are all mine, fairy," he said tenderly. "Little girl, when will you give yourself to me?"

Alix started in horror. With those two still silent presences downstairs it surely was no time to think of marriage. Sir Clarence felt almost angry as he listened to her objections to wait six months, or even then was well-nigh-impossible. If Alix's fortune was to save his estates it must be in his hands speedily.

"You can't love me!" he cried, irritably.

"Not love you!" and the blue eyes turned reproachfully on him. "Why, I have no one else in the whole world to love but you. Oh, Clarence! how can you think I do not love you?"

"It looks like it," he said, gloomily. "Do you know you are a minor? We have no idea whom your father has appointed to take care of you. Your guardian may separate us—for three whole years you will be under his authority."

"Three years will soon pass."

"Three years are an eternity."

His voice frightened her.

"Don't be angry with me," she pleaded. "Don't you know I have no one in the world but you? Oh, Clarence, don't be angry with me!"

"I'm not angry, fairy. Only how can I let you go. Child, don't you know all you are to me? With your beauty, do you think they will let you keep faithful to me for three years? No, Alix, if we are parted it will be for ever."

"Perhaps I shan't have a guardian."

He smiled.

"You don't know, fairy; an heiress of eighteen must have a guardian."

"Then perhaps he'll be nice, and let me marry you."

"Why don't you marry me now when there is no one to object?" and he bent over with a dangerous light shining in his dark eyes.

"Sweetheart, what can be gained by waiting?

Don't you know I will take what care of your heart and life I can? Then why not trust yourself to me?"

Alix was crying softly to herself.

"It seems so wrong—so heartless."

"It would be wrong and heartless to send me away, but it is neither to make me happy. Don't you think your father and mother would had you do what was for your own happiness? Alix, shall we forget them the sooner because we are together?"

"It seems so hasty."

"Do you know that your nearest kinsman is a city lawyer?"

"I have heard so."

"And you think he would give you to me? I tell you, Alix, he is a mercenary, calculating man, whose whole life has been devoted to money-grubbing. He would never let such a prize escape him. He would keep you shut up in his grim old house until you were glad to marry some poor relation of his own just for escape."

She played nervously with one button of his coat, and her flushed, pretty face was averted from his gaze as she said gently,—

"I thought people couldn't be married in a hurry unless they ran away."

"Well?"

"And surely that is wrong?"

"I am not asking you to run away, fairy. I only want you to go with me and spend half-an-hour in some quiet London church. We should come out of it as surely man and wife as though a bishop had performed the ceremony, and a number of noble damsels led you home?"

"And then I should belong to you?"

"Nothing but death could part us then."

"And you wouldn't think lightly of me because I came to you like that?"

"I never could think lightly of you, fairy. You are too precious to me."

A long silence fell upon them both. It was broken at last by Sir Clarence.

"Alix, you must give me my answer. Which is it to be? Will you come to me, or is a cruel fate to part us?"

Alix looked at him questioningly.

He understood.

"Never mind the details. I will see to those when once I have your promise. Once more, Alix, which is it to be, my darling? The happiness of my life is in your hands."

And he meant it. He did love the pretty, fragile child, but he loved her fortune better. Had Alix St. John been portentous Sir Clarence would never have pleaded so passionately for that stolen marriage.

You might have heard a pin fall in that pretty boudoir as Clarence waited for his answer. To any girl of eighteen the decision would have been difficult, but it was far more so for Alix. From a child she had never needed to exercise her own judgment.

Lord and Lady St. John had idolised her, and had taken all care off her shoulders. The very first independent act of her life had been to fall in love with Clarence. She was used to move as her parents told her—to strike out a new line for herself was something unheard of.

But a woman's heart had dawned in that childish breast. She knew now that Clarence Manners was the whole world to her, that she could bear anything on earth more easily than a parting from him. She had no relations save the cousin she had been taught to despise. She dreaded a stern guardian separating her from her lover; and so, in spite of a still small voice whispering to her she was wrong, she put her little hand in her lover's and whispered,—

"Let it be as you wish."

"My darling! my generous child! Fairy, you shall never repent your trust in me."

He had drawn her to himself, and was taking what kisses he pleased from her red-arched lips. What a pretty child she was! How lucky he thought himself to win wealth and freedom from all pecuniary trouble just by offering his hand to the daintiest, fairest

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specimen of womanhood he had seen that year.

"In two days' time, Alix," he murmured, fondly, "you must meet me at Charing Cross, and then we will settle everything." His voice changed. "You have a Mrs. Lacy staying with you, my mother says?"

"She is so good to me; she used to be my old governess years ago."

"You must tell her nothing."

"I am sure she would keep the secret."

"I would not trust her. I met her myself not very long ago, and I took a great dislike to her."

"I am so sorry."

"Are you, pet? but really there is no need to tell her. You will not be out of the house two hours. Mrs. Lacy can believe you are lying down or writing letters in your own room."

He rose to go. He had been with her more than an hour, and yet it seemed to Alix his visit was very short.

"Remember," he whispered, as he kissed her, "I will write to you to-morrow and make all arrangements. You will not fail me, darling?"

Her knees shook so she could hardly stand upright, but her voice was clear and distinct.

"I will not fail you."

No wonder, considering the excitement of that interview, that Mrs. Lacy found her ex-pupil unconscious. She administered resuscitatives and chafed the ice-cold hands tenderly, and soon her trouble was rewarded. Alix slowly opened her eyes.

"You are better now?"

"Oh yes! Has he gone?"

"Sir Clarence? more than an hour ago."

"I wish you liked him," said Alix, wearily. "Oh, Mrs. Lacy, why can't everyone I love like each other?"

The widow's eyes were not quite dry.

"If Sir Clarence is good to you, my darling, I will promise to like him very much."

"I am sure he will be good."

"And you mean to marry him?"

Alix blushed.

"He only spoke to me yesterday," she murmured, "but I think I love him more than like himself. He meant to have asked papa yesterday, but"—with a pitiful sob—"it was too late."

"I expect the new baron will be your guardian."

"Oh, I hope not! I hope not."

"My dear, he is your only living relation, and, indeed, you might be proud of him. The whole world speaks well of him."

"I hate people whom the whole world speaks well of."

Meanwhile all the arrangements for the double funeral were being made. The accident had taken place on Monday—the burial was to be on Saturday.

Lord St. John's lawyer possessed full directions, and, in defiance of hereditary custom, the ceremony was to be in London. The lawyer had the late lord's will safely in his keeping, but he told Dr. West frankly he was not aware of its contents.

"Time after time Lord St. John would talk of making another, but he always put it off. He seemed so strong and well one never thought of hurrying the matter."

"It will make little difference," said the physician; "the entailed property is so ample. Even if he has left the personal away from his daughter she will still be a great heiress."

"I have no idea of the contents."

Dr. West started.

"Did not you make the will?"

No, it has been made for years. I possessed Lord St. John's full confidence, but he never mentioned this will. He always took it for granted he would make another."

"And Mr. St. John?"

"He was here yesterday, and expressed his intention of attending the funeral."

"Will he keep on his profession?"

"He said so. He spoke as if the empty

title were of little value to him. A very noble-looking man; I have always had a great respect for him."

"I suppose the breach between him and his cousin was my lady's fault?"

"I think not. There was some definite cause of quarrel between the two branches of the family, though the same cause was known, I believe, but to two people—the peer himself and Mr. St. John's elder brother."

"Lord St. John, lawyer! It has a strange sound. I should think he'd better chop the title."

"Or marry an heiress. He's a very handsome man."

"Young?"

"Thirty or thereabouts. He looks every inch an English nobleman. I suppose you will not attempt to open the will until the funeral. You are one of the executors, you know."

"It may as well wait till then," returned the physician, who was not a business man.

"Poor Alix, she is too upset to feel any interest in what so nearly concerns her."

"Ah! I asked for who?"

"Mr. St. John."

"Yes; he seemed much interested in her."

"Well, I wish he had seen her and managed to take her fancy. She is engaged to Sir Clarence Manners, and I can't help thinking her fortune has been one of the charms in the baronet's eyes."

"She would never have looked at her cousin, Dr. West," returned the lawyer. "Lady St. John detested him, and of course she brought up her daughter to do the same."

In looking back upon those bright summer days, they always seemed to Alix the longest she had ever spent. She hardly knew how she dragged through their tedious hours; and Mrs. Lacy, who watched her tenderly, decided that her awful affliction had shaken her whole system, for Alix seemed always possessed by some great anxiety. She was mysterious in her manner, spent whole hours shut up in her own room, refusing even her friend's loving companionship, and was actually found one morning, after her habiliments of woe had arrived, attired in some soft, silky white fabric looped and trimmed with blue.

Mrs. Lacy bore with her very patiently, but she could not understand the change in her; the girl's whole nature seemed warped. She was not merely sad, she was mysterious and fretful, resented the least question as interference, and more than once asserted her authority as mistress of the house in a manner that amazed her late governess.

"Poor child!" thought Mrs. Lacy, "trouble is hardening her, or has Sir Clarence said anything to prejudice her against me?"

It was a very quiet funeral, one or two trusted friends, the new Lord St. John, Dr. West, Mr. Cameron, and Sir Clarence Manners, that was all.

They returned to the house, took some hasty refreshment and then adjourned to the library, the very room where Basil St. John had made his pathetic appeal to Lucy.

Mrs. Lacy and the heiress were seated there when the gentlemen entered. The servants were gathered in a group at the end of the room; there was very little interest or excitement in the faces which were turned towards Mr. Cameron.

Most of those present knew that, in point of fact, Lord St. John had had very little to will away, nearly all his property being entailed.

Mr. Cameron cleared his throat ominously, and began. The date of St. John's will struck everyone—it was the day after his wedding, more than two years before Alix was born.

Very briefly the legacies to servants and others were enumerated, and there were many bequests to the testator's dear wife, Isobel, but these, of course, reverted to the estate, since Lady St. John had been taken before her husband.

These trivial items took barely ten minutes;

then, imperceptibly, the interest deepened as the entailed property was briefly named, and the will concluded in these terms: "All this, and whatsoever money, plate, furniture, jewels, or other things I may die possessed of, I hereby bequeath to my only child, Margaret Lucy, and I pray my dearly-loved cousin, Valentine St. John, to become the guardian of my said daughter."

To describe the sensation of those present would be impossible—most believed themselves the victims of a dream.

"There is a codicil," observed Mr. Cameron.

But the codicil did not alter the provisions of the will; it was made after the death of Valentine St. John, and merely directed that his younger brother should assume the post of guardianship to the heiress.

Sir Clarence Manners was the first to break the silence.

"There must be some awful treachery."

"Where?" asked the lawyer, bluntly.

"Everywhere. Who is this Margaret Lucy? What claim had she on Lord St. John to the exclusion of his lawful daughter?"

The new peer rose with a strange, calm dignity which pleased many of the spectators.

"Sir Clarence," he said, coldly, "I will trouble you to remember you are speaking of my kinsman. By what right do you aspire his memory?"

"By the right of being his daughter's chosen protector—her affianced husband."

Lord St. John glanced at Alix.

"Is that so?"

The girl inclined her head.

"Then as her betrothed you will not wrong her father's memory. Basil St. John was twice married, once to a daughter of the people, the second time," he bowed to Alix, "to your mother. The late Lady St. John positively refused to assume the rôle of stepmother; she made it a condition of the marriage that her husband's child should never form part of his home. Basil St. John worshipped her and yielded. The little girl was bred up in obscurity. Lord and Lady St. John were always hoping that the birth of a son would annul her claims. As the years went on their position had increasing difficulties; the son never came, and on every hand their younger daughter was spoken of as their heiress. At last, in pity to her husband's anxiety, Lady St. John consented to receive her stepdaughter. The consent came too late; the family in charge of the child had moved, and the utmost efforts to trace her proved unavailing."

Alix turned to him for the first time.

"How do you know this?"

"Your father wrote me the whole story. It was not expedient for us to meet, but he wished me to be cognizant of his true history."

Clarence Manners took courage.

"This will is only an empty paper after all," he said, more cheerfully. "If the girl is dead no one can keep Alix out of her rights."

Lord St. John turned on him with one withering glance of contempt.

"Miss St. John's death has yet to be proved," he said, sternly. "There is little doubt in my own mind that she is alive. I believe in the event of her death her guardians would have communicated with her father. As to the rights of your fiancée they are, until we find a certificate of the death of her elder sister, simply *nihil*."

Alix turned towards Clarence with one look of agonised appeal, but he never seemed to heed it, he never even saw it. His whole soul was filled with one miserable sense of failure. He almost hated the lovely child because she was the innocent cause of his discomfiture. He was bound to marry a wealthy bride; he had pledged himself to Alix by the most solemn vows—and she was penniless.

Feb. 28, 1885.

CHAPTER IV.

May looked at Mr. Danvers, with intense surprise written on her sweet, wistful face.

"Have you made a mistake?" she asked, simply. "Margaret and my aunt started more than an hour ago. Did you expect to find them here?"

"No," he said, gravely, "I believed they would have left. My visit is to you. Are you going to be so inhospitable as to keep me in the passage?"

"But it's no use your coming in. They won't be home for hours."

"I am glad to hear it, May," and the man's whole face softened. "Don't you understand me? It is you I wish to see."

He followed her into the little parlour. He knew a little of the hardships she endured, but even he had not guessed their extent. A big basket full of clothes in urgent need of repair stood near the chair. It was clear enough the little Cinderella had been left at home to do the mending, while her more fortunate cousin went to the fête.

Bertram sat and watched her with a great pain at his heart. He loved May with all the intensity of a passionate nature. He had come again and again to Acacia Villa just for the chance of seeing her sweet, wistful face. He had been blind to the danger of his visits, but now he had awoken to the peril of such intercourse for him—aye, and perhaps for her. He had resolved on leaving Mackstone, and he had chosen this afternoon for his farewell visit, because he guessed he should find his darling alone.

He must have been seven or eight years older than May—not more, but there were lines, not of time's writing, on his face. Some great disappointment had, perhaps, embittered his youth. You saw traces of it everywhere, in the hard, reckless tone he so often used, in his rare cynical smile, aye, and in his melancholy dark eyes.

"Do you know why I am here, May?" he asked at last. "Do you know what I have come to say?"

"No," returned May, frankly, "unless you thought I should be dull, and came to cheer me up."

"You are never dull?"

She opened her eyes.

"I am awfully dull sometimes."

"No; you have the sweetest, most hopeful nature I ever saw. Little May, do you know it has made my very blood boil some times to see how they treated you. I would do anything in the world just to make you happy."

"You mustn't think about me," said May, gravely; "it could do no good, and Margaret wouldn't like it."

"Margaret? What has she to do with it?"

"Everything, I think."

"May, you are talking riddles."

"I thought you loved her," said May, simply. "I am sure I have heard your marriage planned so often I thought you must have asked her to be your wife."

Strong man as he was, Bertram's frame trembled with agitation.

"My marriage!" and he caught the girl's slim hand in his. "Little May, never speak of that again, never think of that."

His vehemence distressed her.

"Do you mean you have quarrelled?" she asked, timidly. "I remember now it is some days since you were here."

"You are dreaming, child; I never thought of Miss Russell in the way you fancy. I admire her, but I never could have loved her."

"But——"

"But I came here, you think. May, I came here to see you!"

May blushed crimson.

"Do you remember a snowy day last winter, and directing a stranger in the wood? May, I was that lonely wanderer, and I never forgot that chance meeting. I was staying in the neighbourhood, and I made inquiries, until discovered you lived here; then I got an in-

troduction to your aunt, and accepted her invitation. But she has no cause of complaint against me; I never gave her any reason to think I cared for Margaret."

"But she does think so!"

"Well, it can't be helped." But a vision of Miss Russell's anger when she discovered her mistake, a dread of the wrath which would fall on her own head if ever her aunt discovered Mr. Danvers's visit, almost overpowered May, and she burst into a fit of passionate weeping.

Bertram watched her with a strange, pained look on his face, then he asked her,—

"Are you crying because I don't care for your cousin?"

"No! Oh, no!"

"Then what is it, May?"

"Aunt will be so angry. She made so sure of your marrying Margaret. And, oh! if she ever finds out you have been here this afternoon she will think it is my fault!"

She had put up one hand to wipe her streaming eyes, and the action showed Bertram a purple bruise on the slender wrist, which the old-fashioned sleeves of her dress were almost too short to cover.

"May," he cried, hastily, "how did you do that?"

"Oh, it is nothing!"

But Bertram did not think so; he was stroking the discoloured place tenderly with one finger; a horrible suspicion had come to him.

"Aren't you going to tell me?"

No answer.

"You couldn't have fallen down!"

"It was my own fault!" she said, at last.

"I did so want to go to this fête."

"What on earth has your wanting to go to the fête to do with a bruise on your arm?"

"I worried aunt to let me go, and she grew cross, and so——"

"She struck you!" finished Bertram. "Child, surely she never dared?"

"She did not mean to hurt me," said the girl, staunchly. "She had Margaret's parasol in her hand; perhaps she never meant to strike me really, only——"

"Only it came down accidentally on your wrist?" said Bertram, sarcastically. "And this is the woman to whose mercy I must leave you!"

"She is not always cross."

"Is she ever kind, child? Don't you think I have seen what your life is in all these weeks? Don't you know that I have longed again and again to set you free?"

"It don't last always."

"Why," there was a strange light in his eyes, "have you any other friends? Do you think of going to them?"

"I have no other friends in the world; only I have been thinking about things a great deal lately, and I have made up my mind not to stay at Mackstone."

"But where would you go?"

"I don't know; only there must be a place somewhere in this great world that I could fill, I wouldn't mind how hard I worked, Mr. Danvers. I think I would rather be a servant even than bear the taunts and cruel words that are my portion here!"

"You poor little thing!" said Danvers, fondly; "you don't know the difficulties in the way. You don't know, child, what a cruel, wicked world this is!"

She shook her head.

"I think it is a very beautiful world; there seems lots of happiness and kindness in it, only I'm just outside. I seem always to be seeing pleasant things and bright lives, only to be just outside. I think sometimes I feel like Eve must have done when she stood just outside the Garden of Eden!"

Mr. Danvers did not answer her; he was standing with his back to the fireplace, his arms folded on his breast, and his brows knitted in intense thought. An awful temptation had seized him. He loved May so passionately that the bare idea of having her at his side through all the future years made

him intensely happy. He wanted her, and it really seemed no one else in the wide world cared much what became of her. Why should she not come to him? Surely! oh, surely! he could make her happy just by the strength of his great love?

She looked such a child, as she sat there with her grey eyes shining through her tears; she was so sweet and womanly, so terribly alone and at his mercy, that his heart smote him even as he arranged his plans.

"Then you mean to go away?"

"Yes," said May, fiercely. "I wanted Aunt Russell to find me a situation, but she said she couldn't afford it; I should want so many clothes; so I am going to wait until I have saved enough money, and then I shall run away."

"And after?" speaking with a quietness he was far from feeling. "Where should you go to, May?"

"To London," returned the girl, firmly. "I have read in books that no one can hide themselves so thoroughly as in London; the city is so large, and everyone is so busy that they have no time to be curious. Oh, yes, Mr. Danvers, I have quite made up my mind; I mean to go to London."

"And then?"

"I should get work."

"What sort of work?"

"Anything. I am not afraid of work; I should like plenty to do, it would save me from feeling lonely. Perhaps some lady would have me to teach her children, or I could help someone to keep house."

"Shall I tell you what you are fitted for—the place I would choose for you if I could?"

"Please!"

"You are made to be taken care of and loved"—here the strong man's voice almost broke—"to be the darling of a happy home, the star and queen of a man's life. That is the only position you are fitted for. I can't bear to think of you alone in London," he cried, impatiently. "It is bad enough to fancy you now, a drudge to Mrs. Russell and her daughter; but alone in London—a child like you who knows nothing of the world—it is terrible."

"I am not a child really, you know," explained May. "I am almost twenty-one, and things I don't know now I daresay I could soon learn."

Bertram winced as he saw how she had misunderstood him. He took one or two hasty turns up and down the room, then he stopped his walk at the girl's side and took her hand.

"May, have you lived with Mrs. Russell all your life, ever since you can remember?"

"Yes."

"And you really have no other relations?"

"None; that is what comforts me. If I went away, however hard I worked it would not matter; even if I went into a shop and stood behind a counter it wouldn't matter; I should know it was honest work and no disgrace, and there would be no relations or friends in the wide world to care."

"I should care very much, May."

"You!"

"Yes. Don't you count me for a friend?"

"I like you very much."

"But you won't have me for a friend."

"You will soon be going away—you said so yourself, and then we shall never see you again."

"You said just now you liked me, May. Shan't you be sorry, just a little sorry, never to see me again?"

"Yes," she confessed. "But then, you see, our paths in life will be so different. You are very rich, and if you go to London you will live somewhere in a grand house at the West-end, and I—I shall belong to the workaday world; I shall be just one of the toilers for daily bread."

She broke off with a kind of sob, but she had said too much; she had given Bertram the opportunity he wanted.

"May, I never meant to tell you. I thought I would go away and leave you free; but, oh!

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my darling, I love you; my whole life will be desolate if it must be spent apart from you. Oh, May! my little girl, my innocent, grey-eyed princess, don't you think love would make you happy?"

"Love!"

"It should never fail you," cried Bertram, passionately. "When your hair was grey and your fair face lined with furrows, I should love you just the same. I can offer you nothing but love; only, my own, that should never fail you."

"You really care for me? You want to marry me, not Margaret?"

"I never wanted to marry Margaret. I do want you, May. I want you for my heart's dearest treasure; I want you for my darling, till death parts us."

"It seems so wonderful!"

"But it is true, dear. May, tell me; can you ever care for me?"

"I like you better than anyone I know," she whispered, "but I do not love you. I don't think, Mr. Danvers, I ever shall love anyone like that."

"If I am dearest to you—if you give me the right to be always near you—I will be content to wait for the love, my darling. May, is it really so? Am I indeed to be happy? Darling, will you give yourself to me?"

"My aunt!" she said, in alarm.

"She shall never have another opportunity to be unkind to you. May, I am leaving Mackstone by the six o'clock train. Darling, I am to be happy, you must come with me."

"To-night!"

"Do you think I would leave you to brave Mr. Russell's anger, when she learns I am leaving Mackstone without proposing to her daughter? Do you think, May, I should have a happy moment if I knew you were at her mercy?"

"How you must love me!" said the girl, wond'ringly; "to care so much."

The words grieved him to the heart. He did love her, he loved her as few women are loved; but, for all that, he was working her grievous wrong.

"Shall you ever love me, May?" he asked, wistfully.

"I don't know. Mr. Danvers, I think I must be very cold and unfeeling, but I have a strange presentiment I shall go through my life without loving anyone."

Alas! alas! there came a day when she knew she was mistaken, and a wild regret came to her that the presentiment had not been true.

(To be continued.)

THE WRECKER'S DAUGHTER.

The wrecker's cabin is under the ledge
Of a grey-chalk cliff, on a sandy slip,
Where the sea hath ever its teeth on edge,
Just as he curls his cold blue lip.
Fragments of shipwreck strew the strand,
The skeleton of a whaleboat still
Bleaches alone, half buried in sand,
And half exposed to the wild waves' will.

Here it was that I loved of yore to roam—
For the wrecker's daughter was fair and brave;
Her teeth were white as the ocean foam,
Her eyes were blue as the mid-sea wave.
Every rocky cavern has taken the hint
Of her joyous presence in echoes sweet.
All the porous sands have shown the print
Of the Arab arch of her brown bare feet.

I was away from the world's bright stir,
A man self-buried, grim recluse,
But I never tired to be with her,
It seemed that my life had found some use.
Only to gaze at her comeliness,
To tell her she was so simply fair;
To counsel her in her simple dress,
And how to arrange her splendid hair.

Sometimes she wore it in two thick braids,
Or far adrift, like a golden mist.
Or, after the manner of Grecian maids,
Around her head in an Oread twist.
But always it formed so fitting a part
In the artless joy of her careless grace,
I could look in her eyes and read her heart,
And her soul looked out from her shining face.

The wrecker himself was bluff and glum,
But the weather was fair, and the tavern
had him;
So the witnesses were blind and dumb,
As we roamed together the sea's white brim.
I think of it now with a tenderer grace,
As I stand at the edge of the breaking wave,
For mounded up at the chalk-cliff's base
Is the little hillock that marks her grave.
N. D. U.

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT.

It was the dead of night, and Colonel Darrell was sitting alone in his lodgings in Paris, sorting papers and tearing up those that did not require to be kept, when a low tap came at the door, followed by two others in rapid succession. "Come in," he called out hastily, looking up with a certain expectancy in his dark eyes, because he recognised the peculiar signal.

A small form, robed in the dress of a mendicant friar, crept softly into the room; but as the cowl fell back from the bent head Colonel Darrell saw, as he knew he would, the ugly features of Zebedee Sleeman.

"So you are here?" with raised eyebrows; "I never gave you orders to leave Vienna!"

"No, and I didn't need to wait for them, or else you would have had to do all the rest yourself," with a significant glance.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I was trapped by the police, and I didn't think you would care to see me put into either witness box or dock; so I got away with the help of a fellow to whom I gave a large sum of money."

"But how were you such a fool as to let yourself be caught?" inquired Darrell, with fierce impatience, for the mere mention of the police reminded him of a tragedy in the past.

Zebedee rubbed his shaggy head. "I think the devil was in it. I made sure everything

was safe and went out, leaving the papers in Afré's care; and on my way to the telegraph office I was stopped by a fellow named Hirsch, who was evidently put up to do the job by Verreker, for as soon as I got away from the first I came upon him dressed like a common workman." An exclamation of surprise escaped from Darrell. "He held me till the police came up and took me; so I owe him something for that. What beats me is, that there wasn't a word of the despatches, but they charged me with being a socialist!"

Colonel Darrell opened his eyes. The charge did not scare him, as it might most other people; although he knew that he was very likely compromised by some of the papers found in his servant's pockets; but he questioned Zebedee eagerly about the lost papers. Sleeman knew no more about their final resting-place than his master, for he was not aware of Verreker's second visit to his room. He guessed that his vengeance had gone home, in the first instance, for he had seen him stalk by that very afternoon, looking like a ghost. He gathered that he was very ill from a blow received in the disturbance which was raised by the sympathisers in his own misfortune; but whether he were in disgrace or not he could not tell.

"But I can," said Darrell, irritably; "the fellow has been saved by some stupid mistake of yours again. This is the third time you've failed. The first, when you or the lightning nearly did for him on the night of the storm. The second, when you stole the wrong papers which were never missed, and never wanted; and this third time, when you began better, but ended miserably, as usual."

This was all the reward he got for his patient plodding through the ways of vice, for his sleepless nights and anxious days—for all the thousand miseries he had endured for a master who never thanked him! Yet Zebedee was drawn towards Louis Darrell by a feeling that was beyond affection, and on the verge of adoration. One grateful look would have been sufficient guardian for a service which had narrowly missed costing him his life or his liberty, but he did not get it. Colonel Darrell never forgot to pay an injury; but a willing tool might work for ever, to be thrown away into obscurity when no longer of any use.

There was a long pause, whilst Zebedee rubbed the arm which he had broken some time before in an attempt to scale a wind-watt the British Embassy, and Darrell was thinking of some other scheme by which to baffle Verreker in the end.

"There is a girl who hates Valerie," it flashed across him like a whisper from the evil one himself; "something might be made out of her. You can go now," to Zebedee, "and don't come near me again so long as you are in Paris. I shall want you in England, but not here. Since you were fool enough to let yourself be searched we must never be seen together."

"How could I help it?" in a sullen tone, his heart rising in sudden indignation. "I wished I had died, that I do!"

"It might have been better," said Darrell, coldly. "A tool, according to his creed, was never to fail, always to work, and, above all, to succeed. Without a word, Zebedee turned to leave the room.

Darrell let his eye run down to the bottom of the paper he was reading, and then called out, "Have you any money?"

"No," without turning round, as he stood, a small black figure facing the door.

"Then why didn't you ask for some?" unlocking a drawer. He counted out a certain amount of bank-notes, and a small heap of gold, then pushed the money across the table.

"Look here, Sleeman, don't turn rusty, or 'pon my soul, I'll give you up. If you expect praise when you've failed most abominably you won't get it. Do you want me to look out for another servant?"

His dark eyes fixed themselves with a

WEDDING IN ABYSSINIA.—Admiral Hewitt, while on his mission to King J.-hn, in behalf of the English Government, witnessed an interesting matrimonial celebration in Adowa. The town is a collection of eight or nine hundred inhabitants—mere huts—and is too subject to the raids of hostile tribes to present the flourishing appearance which the capital of a large kingdom should. As with all semi-barbarous nations—for, although nominally Christian, the Abyssinians can be called little else—the weddings are celebrated with a curious jumble of religious rights and social ceremonies, apparently borrowed from Christian, Mahomedan, Jewish, and the aboriginal traditions. There is a civil ceremony at the house of the bride's father, where oaths of fidelity are exchanged, and subsequently a religious service. After the former, however, the bridegroom, probably in imitation of the custom of his forefathers to capture their wives by force, takes his bride in his arms, and carries her either to his house or her own. The crowd of invited guests follow him and aid him in holding the orthodox nuptial canopy over her. There is, of course, unlimited feasting, and an enormous quantity of spirituous liquors is consumed, of which the priest—who in Abyssinia is a veritable "jovial friar"—takes his full share.

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hard, questioning stare on Zebedee's clouded face. It seemed to penetrate to the very core of his heart, till he shrank as if in pain, and shivered. "Don't talk like that, or I'll go mad!"

"Then behave yourself for the future," sternly, as if he were a nigger-driver discoursing with a slave. "I warn you, if you fall next time you and I must part!"

"You know if I could choose," he answered, miskingly, in a voice that shook, but not with fear, "I'd rather die than not do the work you give me!"

"Then succeed," and Colonel Darrell, accustomed to military brevity, gave a little nod of dismissal,

Sleeman slunk out of the room with the air of a coward, afraid to look any man in the face, when, in reality, in his mis-shaped form there was a brave, undaunted spirit, ready to do or dare anything in the service of his master. In other hands he might have led a useful, honourable life, for he was capable of a patient, plodding industry which would have wearied many toilers; but in Colonel Darrell's service he was trained to evil with sedulous care; scoffed at if he shrank from sin, praised if he plunged into crime without a shudder, till now his conscience was successfully stifled, and never gave him any trouble. He could sleep like a child, though a murder was to be committed by his hands before the dawn; he could see a man die, and contemplate his own end without blenching!

He hurried to his lodgings like a rat to its hole, and striking a match, lighted a candle, and looked round with eager eyes. There was a movement in the corner of the room; Afra unwound herself from the folds of an old coat on which she had been lying, and, with a joyful bound, crossed the small patch of carpet, and sprang upon his shoulder. There she sat, rubbing her whiskers softly against his pallid cheek, and purring as if to show her pleasure in seeing him again; and the hard face relented, the sullen look went out of the dull, grey eyes, and the lips which were prone to cursing uttered a soft cooing,

"My pretty one! She cares for me, don't she? It wasn't her fault that those papers were lost, I know. They would have looked in a cupboard, or a drawer, but no one would think of upsetting a cat in order to find what was under her. They nearly killed her out of spite, but I don't know how it happened; and I should like to wring the fellow's neck who laid a hand on my beauty. We'll go off the hooks together, some day, for there will be nobody to give you anything but kicks and blows when I'm out of the way, and I couldn't bear the world without my little comfort."

The cat seemed to listen with an air of pleasure, and licked his face in sign of gratitude.

Perhaps he liked the attentions of his cat's tongue better than most, for he could not remember when he had been kissed by the lips of man or woman, boy or girl.

His favourite was no longer white, for he had dyed her black in order not to attract the suspicious eyes of the police, and in some infernal manner induced her to give up the feline habit of licking her own coat, so that she remained black, at least for a season.

He heard nothing from his master for some time, but at last he received a message to proceed at once to England. He did not know whether the police were still on the look-out for him or no; he had reason to suppose that his first step on the pier at Dover might also be the first step to a cell at Dartmoor, and yet it never occurred to his peculiar mind to hesitate.

Colonel Darrell told him to go, so he went, taking Afra with him.

Unmolested he got into the train at Dover, disguised as a sailor, and late in the evening he proceeded on foot through the forest, taking

an un frequented path lest he should be recognised on the way.

A little black pig, running wild in the mud and slush, looked at him inquiringly to see if this two footed animal meant to disturb him; but finding that the stranger seemed bent on pursuing his way without intention to anything else, he went on grubbing contentedly amongst the roots, before the sound of his footsteps was out of his ears.

The forest had a weird, desolate look, with distances of mysterious shadows, where there was no sound except the continual dripping from the leafless branches.

Zebedee Sleeman was footsore and very weary, but he trudged on without stopping a moment to rest, with his pack on his back and his large feet sinking deep in the mud.

Dully, as if it did not interest him much, he wondered what work was awaiting him in the old home of the Darrells.

Perhaps the girl with the large, frightened eyes was to be trapped, and brought into the snare.

How scared she looked that day when he gave her his master's letter in the garden!

He could almost have found it in his heart to pity her, only he had no pity left but for himself and Afra.

Whatever he had to do he should do it, without caring a straw whether it injured any one or not. That was not his lookout, but his master's, and with a groan of relief he opened the iron gate which led into the garden, and looked up with the flicker of a smile at the grey walls of Ivory Keep rising mistily out of the shadows.

This was the only place on earth which the hunchback regarded as home.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VIPER'S STING.

"I HAVEN'T heard from Rex for ever so long," said Miss Flossie Springold, extending her tiny feet towards the blaze, as she sat in a lounging-chair in the boudoir of Beaufort, and held up a Japanese screen between her complexion and the fire. "What a dirt the man is! I daresay he has been making love to a number of lovely Austrians, and I shall have to read him a lecture when he comes back!"

Lady Valerie smiled scornfully. She had begun to disbelieve in Miss Springold's engagement to Mr. Verreker, and the fact that Flossie did not know that he was expected in England that very day seemed to verify her doubts.

"Mr. Verreker has had other things to think of than flirtations. A man laid up with brain-fever can't do much in that line."

Flossie grew crimson.

"Brain-fever! What do you mean? Has he been ill?"

"Didn't you know it? I thought you told me that you were engaged to him?" looking at her with subdued triumph from under the shade of her long, dark lashes.

The delicate eyebrows were drawn together in a frown.

"I really don't remember. I daresay I said we were going to be married some day, but that's very vague. I suppose he didn't write to me for fear of frightening me," she added, slowly.

"Perhaps not; but there could scarcely be the same reason for not telling you that he is coming to spend his sick-leave at Beaufort?" a quiet smile hovering round her lips.

Flossie was so startled that she dropped the little riding-whip with which she had been playing, but she recovered her composure by the time she had picked it up.

"Of course he could not tell me that if he did not mention the other. I wish there were a chance of his spending Christmas with us. Poor, dear fellow, he clings to us because he has no other home."

As a matter of fact Lady Valerie knew that Rex Verreker had never stayed at Seasdale

since she was old enough to take any interest in his movements, but she was too proud to enter into a discussion on the subject; she only said, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes,—

"I should think he was certain to stay as long as that, and he arrives to-night."

"To-night, dear me!" fidgeting on her chair, and feeling quite upset. "This is very sudden!"

"Yes. He was not to arrive till Saturday, but something hurried Lord Daintree at the last, and they didn't like to separate."

"Is he going to stay here as well?" asked Flossie, her spirits sinking to zero.

"Yes, I think so—for a few days. He is a great friend of the De Ruyvignys, and we thought it would be pleasanter for Countess Marie, whom they are expecting from Vienna, if he stayed for a little while until she grows accustomed to us strangers."

"You've done a clever thing!" exclaimed Miss Springold, her heart beating fast with anger and jealousy. "Do you know that it was with a girl of the name of De Ruyvigny that Rex flirted all the autumn?"

"No!" drawing up her long neck fitful disdain. "I neither know nor care. Let him flirt with the Austrians if he will; I know he likes his English friends the best."

"Of course he does—friendship is something, and love another; and that reminds me of a little thing that distressed me much. You heard of that article in *Veracity*?"

Lady Valerie shook her head.

"Oh, yes; you needn't deny it. You stayed away from the ball in consequence, and I thought you were so wise. Well, I only meant to say—"

"Stop! What was this article? and why do you say I stayed away on account of it, when I never knew a word about it?"

"Didn't you? How very odd? Bruin did—Flossie generally called the Marquis by his nick-name—" and he is such an ally of yours that I thought he was sure to have told you."

"What was it?" in a low voice, whilst he clasped her hands tightly together, in the effort to be composed. Was this the reason that the Marquis had begged her so earnestly to stay at home, as if something important to herself had hung upon her decision? It had puzzled her then—perhaps she could understand it now.

Flossie hesitated, as a cat may delay before the final spring upon a mouse that she knows will soon be her prey.—

"I scarcely like to tell you, but I suppose you will insist on knowing!"

"Of course—I shall," she murmured, with dry lips.

"It made some allusion to a lady of high rank—only daughter of an Earl—who who made assignations in the twilight, and indulged in clandestine correspondence, which she was careless enough to let drop upon the floor."

"Did it say that?" her large eyes wide open in a frown.

"Yes, and a good deal more," she added mendaciously, "which I will spare you."

There was a long pause, whilst Lady Valerie stared imploringly into the fire, as if invoking a friendly spirit to her aid. Presently she threw back her head with a light laugh.

"It is absurd to bother myself about it. There are plenty of Earls' daughters in the country besides myself. Why should it be me?"

"Your name was spelt in asterisks," said Flossie, quietly.

"What intolerable impertinence! My father shall prosecute the paper for libel."

"But was it a libel?" very softly, just like a feline purr. "Have you never met anybody in the twilight? Have you never had a letter which you have shown to no one else?"

Lady Valerie wrung her hands as if in pain.

"Haven't you?" she asked, hoarsely.

"Of course I have, but I manage my own

isks better. I should die if they got into newspaper; and I verily believe my father would turn me out of the house."

"That would be ridiculous! I've done no harm."

"No harm, at all from your own point of view, but the world never forgives you for being found out."

"Then it may do the other thing," proudly, with a flash of her old spirit. "I can do with it very well."

"You can't my dear, excuse me. Go to the nest, and have nothing but men to surround you—go to a ball, and have the dowagers turning their backs on you—go to the Row, and find all your feminine acquaintances apparently struck with blindness. It won't be pleasant I assure you, and I could cry when I think of it!"

"Nonsense, they would not dare. I'm not only a Jones or a Smith!"

"That makes it all the worse—the Browns, Joneses, and Robinsons will crow with delight at your actions at you. You're prettier than any of them, and they'll be dying of jealousy over the fashion of plain girls who can't get any partners. If you weren't Lord Beaumont's daughter, it would have been ever so much better for you. There is no pleasure in pulling down unless the victim stands on a pedestal."

"What shall I do? Tell me," resting on her friend's shoulder more than on her sympathy.

"Do? Ah! What's a difficult question"—thrusting her own smooth little chin. "You are so different. If I had begun as you did, I should go on to the end. Write him a quiet note of a sheet, meet him every day instead of once or twice, and then, when all the world cried out in one loud shout, I'd silence them by an invitation to the wedding!"

Lady Valerie rose from her chair, her face deadly pale. "Are you mad? I wanted your advice, and you are only laughing at me. You know I couldn't do it."

"No, I don't," laughing slightly, as she looked up into her friend's excited face. "An altar-call would surely be the best place for meeting a lover after all these questionable assignations! It would give an air of respectability to the whole thing, which lessens you in wanting at present." She knew that each word was a torture in itself.

"As if it lightened the load on her heart. Rex Verreker was coming to Beaumont, but he might come too late, and find Lady Valerie tied by an engagement to another.

"You don't suppose I ever talked to him in my own pleasure?" in a low voice, muddling with scorn and indignation.

"My dear, it is against common sense to think you didn't," jumping up, and putting his hands on Lady Valerie's shoulders, whilst he looked into her face with sparkling eyes. "Hurry him you must, and you needn't look like a martyr, for he's the handsomest man in the world; and everyone knows that you will desperately fall in love with him the first sight you ever saw him!"

Lady Valerie drew herself away as if the small hands had been two scorching iron. "I'm much obliged to you for telling me; I didn't know it before."

"How very odd! Mind you ask me to the wedding, and have the loveliest dresses possible for the bridesmaids. May I ring for you?"

"I will," hurrying, not at all unwillingly, to the bell. She was longing for Miss Springold to leave the room, lest her own feelings should grow too much for her, as her fingers were itching to box her ears. "Perhaps you will be good enough to inform your friends that they have made a scandal out of nothing. If they think I stayed away from the other ball because I was afraid, they are very much mistaken, and I should like to see who will dare to turn the cold shoulder on me when I appear at the next."

"Don't appear; discretion is the best part of valour," with a wise little nod.

"I shall go, if only to prove my own innocence."

Flossie adjusted her masculine hat, drew on her dog-skin gloves, and settled her collar.

"That's all very well, you know," with her head on one side, "but you are not innocent, and everybody knows it. You had better make up your mind to it; you can't marry anyone else, so you must marry him."

"I can marry whom I choose," throwing back her head, and her eyes flashing gloriously.

"Yes," said Flossie, as she got nearer the door. "There are plenty who would marry the Earl's daughter; but wouldn't they lead her a life of it when they found out—and they would find out—it is in everybody's mouth! Mark my words," holding up her finger, "you will never have any peace of mind till you are safely married to Colonel Daniel."

"I should never have any peace if I were," cried Valerie, trembling with anger; but Miss Springold was already far down the corridor, and the answer was wasted on the furniture.

The talk of the country! Could anything be worse to a girl of a refined and sensitive nature? She who had held her head so high to be pointed at by the finger of scorn, to be whispered about behind her back, to have her most secret actions canvassed by one gossip after another. That letter which she had dropped on the night of Rex Verreker's accident—she had not thought much about it, for there were so many other things at the moment to occupy her mind; but when the first anxiety about his safety was over she had looked for it in the pocket of the dress she had worn the night, and wondered that she could not find it. That letter had evidently fallen into dangerous hands—Parton's, perhaps—he had been discharged for opening an envelope addressed to the Earl. He had gone away in great anger, and he had carried his anger and revenge to Scarsdale!

She understood it now. Flossie had learnt her secret from a discarded butler; but who in the wide world hated her enough to send that paragraph to *Veracity*?

There was a sound of wheels on the gravel outside, of opening doors and hurrying steps inside the Castle. The Countess Marie, the Marquis of Daintree, and Rex Verreker had arrived, and she must go down to meet them.

She pressed her hands to her throbbing temples, and, still with that hunted look in her eyes, hurried downstairs.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WELCOME GUESTS.

"Come, my dear," said the Earl, impatiently, from the bottom of the stairs, "be quick, or our guests will think you wanting in courtesy."

The carriage drove up, and he went out under the high portico, followed by his daughter, eager to do honour to the child of his Austrian friend.

"Welcome to Beaumont!" he said, warmly, as Marie de Ruvigny, with a charming smile, placed her hand in his.

"This is Valerie, who intends to keep you a prisoner as long as possible."

"I am sure I shall be in no hurry to go away," looking up into the lovely face, which, in spite of jealousy and foolish prejudice, won her heart at the first glance.

In her impulsive, foreign fashion she kissed her hostess on both cheeks, and then drew back to see the meeting between Lady Valerie and Rex Verreker.

There was not much to see—a hand-clasp, a glance straight into each other's eyes—but two hearts leapt as if they would bound from their fletchers, and doubt and fear were alike forgotten in the joy of being together under the same roof.

"Ahem!" said a voice from the rear.

"Oh! Lord Daintree, I didn't see you!"

she exclaimed, with a pang of self-reproach.

"Why did you hide yourself?"

"I've been standing at your elbow for the last five minutes. Is that what you call hiding?"

It was he who had brought her lover back to her, so he told himself that it would be folly to grumble if he were forgotten for once in a way; and he stepped aside, so that Verreker might walk with her back to the library.

The maid was taken possession of by the housekeeper and Susan, but as neither of them could speak a word of German their wish to be civil had to be expressed by signs and actions.

Beaumont, who was never at a loss with any foreigner, proved himself of great use as an interpreter, and Phillips confessed to having picked up a little German on his foreign tour, so that Anna Malsen got on better than she expected.

"Something has happened," said Rex Verreker, in a low voice, as he and Lady Valerie were alone for a few minutes in the library after the Countess had been taken to her room. "I saw it directly I caught sight of your face before I got out of the carriage."

"Flossie Springold has been here, and she worried me; but let us talk about you. You got out of your hole!" with a smile.

"Yes, Daintree helped me. What a splendid fellow he is! He just saved me from cutting my throat!"

"You wouldn't have done that!"

"I was very near it. You see, I thought it was all up with me. I couldn't have come here again, I knew that."

"Not after my letter?" as a rose-pink stole into her cheeks.

"Not after that;" looking down into her face, in a way that made a delicious shyness come over her.

"Then it would have been wicked of you, downright wicked!" she exclaimed, passionately; thinking how blank her life would have been if he had stayed away.

"I had no choice—but your letter; I blessed you for that! It did me more good than all the doctor's medicine. I keep it here," tapping his breast-pocket; "and when I feel limp it acts like a tonic."

"And yet if you were still 'in your hole,' it would have done no good. I'll never write to you again!"

"You couldn't be so unjust! Have you been very gay this autumn?"

"No. There was the usual county-ball; but I didn't go to it."

"Why not?" watching the cloud which had come over her face.

"Because—because—" hesitating and flushing crimson—"Is it so wonderful that I should stay away?"

"Not at all! But I thought you had a reason."

"I had. You will know before long. Flossie Springold is spreading it over the neighbourhood!" her chest heaving, the tears rushing to her eyes.

His face darkened.

"I should like to know it without appealing to Miss Springold."

"Ask Lord Daintree; he knows!"

"You told him before me?" in offended surprise.

"You needn't be afraid—the words would have choked me. But, oh, Mr. Verreker! whatever they tell you," turning to him, imploringly, "you won't believe I meant any harm?"

"I couldn't," he said, simply. "Lady Valerie!" and his voice vibrated with suppressed emotion, "do you take me for a fool? Don't you think I can know an angel when I see one?"

The mere sight of her standing before him, in all her womanly grace and wonderful beauty, was too much for him. The blood coursed wildly through his veins, maddest words of passion rushed to his lips, which might perchance have passed them if Lord Beaumont



["BUT HOW WERE YOU SUCH A FOOL AS TO LET YOURSELF BE CAUGHT?" INQUIRED DARRELL.]

had not come into the room, and suggested that he should take an hour's rest before dinner.

He combated the suggestion with hot disdain; but Lady Valerie's anxiety for his health, when once aroused, would not be stayed; and when she joined her entreaties to those of her father he was obliged to submit.

It seemed as if she was going to have tea all by herself, for the Earl had to go and see his bailiff on business as soon as the silver teapot made its appearance; but Lord Daintree sauntered into the room just in time, and was delighted to find his pretty hostess sick.

She told him that she had found out his reason for not wishing her to go to the country ball; whereat he opened his eyes and looked disgusted.

"If Miss Flossie doesn't take care, I'll wring her neck, as Verreker did to Sleeman's cat," he burst out, savagely.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't quite do!" with a sad smile.

"I don't care! She ought to be flogged alive!"

"But what shall I do?" looking up into his excited face.

Somewhat the sight of its homely features seemed to give her fresh courage.

"Do! Face it out! I was a fool to tell you to stay at home; but, to confess the truth," looking very much ashamed of himself, "I get as nervous as a woman when there is anything to do with you!"

"You've been one of my best friends!"

"I've done nothing except bother you; but I hope I shall deserve a 'thank you' before I've quite finished. This is my advice:—Fill your house with tip-top people; then take them all to the hunt ball on Christmas-eve. If there's a soul there who dares to treat you with anything but the greatest respect, we'll give her such a dusting as she never had in her life before!" he said hotly.

"You take it for granted that it will be a woman!"

"Yes! I'd lay any money that you would never have to complain of a man. What do you think of the Countess?"

"Charming. I think I could be quite fond of her!"

"She's a girl to be trusted—not a viper, like Miss Springold. Look here, Lady Valerie. I'll get Marshall down; he's always ready to escape from that sour-tempered woman, his wife, and I think between us we shall be able to guarantee you from any annoyance."

With three devoted friends, and a stranger ready to help in time of need, there seemed to be no fear for Lady Valerie, and her spirits rose. Verreker rode to the meets with them, and stayed behind with Lady Valerie because he was not as yet strong enough to follow; whilst Countess Marie, under the escort of Lord Beaudesert and the Marquis, rode in the first flight, and showed that she was as perfect a horsewoman as the Empress herself. Often it was growing quite dark when she came home with a mud-stained habit, a flushed cheek, and Lord Daintree by her side, exulting in the greater freedom of England, which allows chaperons to be forgotten on the hunting-field.

The long tête-à-têtes were enjoyed by Lady Valerie and Rex Verreker, which seemed to him to have the sweetness of forbidden fruit; but he gave himself up to the intoxicating pleasure of his love, reckless of the future, forgetting all in the charm of the present. Miss Beck, remembering her little mistake in the past, took care not to be too elated, but kept carefully out of the way, when her services seemed to be most needed, for the sake of propriety. As to Lady Valerie, she had never been so happy in her life before. Resolutely she cast all her fears behind her, and threw herself into any pleasure that offered. Nothing she liked better than to

hear of Verreker's adventures in Vienna—of Marie de Ruyigny and the policeman fighting about the identity of a carpenter—or the strange white cat, who was trained to hide as well as to steal, and, lastly, of Frau Schmidt and her three pretty children. She begged the Marquis to let her send something to the small household in Vienna; and he undertook to have a sewing-machine despatched as a Christmas present. Great was Frau Schmidt's delight when it arrived, and she took such pleasure in her new possession that work ceased to be a toil.

One day Rex Verreker woke up, as if from a dream. What was he doing? Taking an unfair advantage, as some people would have said, of his host's kindness, by making love to his daughter. Was he making love? No, except by looks and tones over which he had no control. White as a sheet he went to find the Earl in his study. "I'm going away this evening, and I want to thank you for all your kindness!"

"This is very sudden!" looking hard into the young resolute face. "Are you tired of us so soon?"

"If I waited till I was tired of you, I should never go," he blurted out.

"I don't think you could stay too long," said the Earl, slowly.

"I have already, for my own peace," feeling as if his heart would burst.

"Ahem! perhaps you had better ask my daughter about hers."

Rex started. "You can't mean it! What am I? I've no rank—no fortune."

"If you have stolen my daughter's peace you mustn't run away with it, that's all I say," with a slight smile.

Rex grasped Lord Beaudesert's hand with a radiant face, and decided to stay for the hunt-ball, not knowing that the Earl's kindness was due to the efforts of his rival, the Marquis of Daintree.

(To be continued.)

NOVELLETTE

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["OH! SHE BROKE OUT WILDLY, "FORGIVE—FORGIVE ME, IF YOU CAN!""]

NOVELLETTE.]

JOHN'S WIFE.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

JOHN TREDENNIS walked through the streets of Moreland "the happiest man in Christendom," as he told himself; for him the soft, May day was golden, for success had crowned his love—the love that had grown with his growth, and ripened with his ripening manhood. There had been a time when he had thought it hopeless, had scarce dared to lift his eyes to his divinity, who had seemed as far removed from him as the sun from the earth.

John had not always been a rich man; he could look back to hard days that had passed but a few years since. He was a self-made man, and was young enough to enjoy his well-earned riches, and to look forward to a long life of happiness. So he trod the old familiar streets with quick, firm tread and glad heart; and men meeting him wondered at the brightness of his face, the exultant light in the dark eyes, and thought "Tredennis has made another lucky hit."

John paused at last outside a prim-looking house, with a strip of uncultivated ground before it. It was very unlovely, and jarred somewhat upon his nerves; but he thought, "Our home shall be a complete contrast to this!" and swinging open the gate went in. In what was called the "parlour" two women were sitting—one, old, crabbed and ugly; the other might have been any age, from twenty-eight to forty; was pale, with drab hair, and eyes of a nondescript shade. Both looked up as he entered, and the elder said,—

"You are late, John!" The younger rose, and set his tea before him.

"I am rather late, but I've been up to the Myrtles, and could not leave before," and he looked so suspiciously happy that his mother questioned,—

"Did you see the young ladies?" and there was a tone more of acidity in her voice! "But of course you did, or you would not have stayed so long. When is Miss Eily going back to her aunt?"

"She is not going at all. Why should you suppose she is? It is now three years since she came home."

"What a memory you have for dates, John!" the younger woman remarked, "at least when they concern Miss Eily Donner."

"You're right, Lucy," with a good-tempered laugh; then he added, gravely, "I have a piece of news for you, mother. I have spoken to Miss Eily to-day, and she has promised to marry me!"

Lucy started up, her hand to her side. "I wish you joy," she said, with a shrill laugh. "I wish you joy of your wife, John Tredennis—she will make you very happy," and she hurried out of the room.

"Mother," he said, in a bewildered way, "what is the matter with Lucy."

"You must be blind not to see she cares for you, and I always set my heart on your marrying your cousin. She would have made you a good, hardworking wife, but you must have a lady!" contemptuously; "a fine lady, used to London ways, who will spend your money faster than you can earn it, and bring you to beggary; who will look down on your poor old mother—"

John was about to protest against the whole of her speech, but checked himself, remembering Eily had said, "Don't ask me to associate with your mother, we should quarrel, I know!" so he held his peace, and Mrs. Tredennis went on angrily,—

"Don't bring her to see me, I should only tell her some truths she wouldn't like to hear. Don't ask me to live with her, because I won't; I'll go to the workhouse first."

He interrupted her.

"I shall arrange all for your comfort, and I think it best there should be two establishments. I should prefer, too, that you and Lucy

should move into one of the villas in Brooklyn-road; this house is scarcely suitable for you. I have felt it long."

"Ah! your wife that is to be has already made you proud. I won't move out of my home to please her. I've lived here ever since your father died, and here I mean to die myself—if we don't come to want before then."

"Do be reasonable, mother; just think over my proposal, and give me your decision when I come home. I'm going back to the Myrtles, but I shall be home early."

"I suppose," Mrs. Tredennis said scornfully, "you'll be dining late, and keeping fine company when you're married, and your wife will care more about her dresses and grand friends than for you. If you were a poor man she would have said no."

"I cannot allow you to speak so unjustly of Miss Donner," rather hotly; "you must remember I love her."

"And where do you propose living?" she asked, a little awed by his manner.

"Grove House is for sale; I thought of buying it. It is a very pretty place, and the grounds are decidedly nice, but of course I shall consult Eily first!"

"Grove House!" almost shrieked Mrs. Tredennis, "why it will cost a mint of money."

John's dark face wore an amused look, and a spice of mischief was in his manner as he said,—

"And of course Eily must have a carriage; the wharf pays better every day, and I can well afford it," and he laughed outright, because his mother threw up her hands with a gesture of horror.

"John," she said, solemnly; "you must be mad! What does the girl want with a carriage she hasn't one now? Oh! she is an artful miss, and has played her game well; everybody knows old Donner will have next to nothing to leave his girls."

But John was out of the room, and Mrs. Tredennis hurried away to Lucy, who was

sitting at her window with hardset face, and miserable eyes. Said Mrs. Tredennis,—

"I want to talk to you about John's madness," but Lucy said harshly,—

"Not to night, I can't bear it;" and very much offended, Mrs. Tredennis dressed herself and went to change, to prey loudly over John's shortcoming, the said John being in blissful ignorance of this.

He reached the Myrtles, and crossing the lawn was met by a rather pretty girl, with yellow hair, who told him "Father is out, and Eily is in the drawing-room," so he made his way there. A girl who might have been twenty-one, that who had looked younger, was lying on a sofa, a large white fan in her hand. She looked over its feathered edges at him with an arch glance.

"Aren't you sorry to find me alone, Mr. Tredennis?" she said softly, and the grey eyes smiled.

"You know that I am not; but don't you think you would come to call me John now?"

"Do you think it would require very much practice, because I am dreadfully indolent?"

John laughed, and tried to look over the fan at her, but she managed it very cleverly, and frustrated his design, laughing merrily at his said.—

"You are too daftorum for me, but I shall have to take your fan away if you use it as a screen."

"Can you?" said, smilingly granting him a glimpse of her flushed face. "Do you think you have sufficient strength to compete with me. I warn you I am quite an Amazon."

John laughed outright as he glanced down at the pretty recumbent figure, the little soft, white hands, and rounded arms.

"If you were an Amazon I should not have asked you to be my wife, as big and aggressive women are my aversion," and he scoured her hands, drew away the fan, and laid his cheek to her flushed face.

"Do you know, Eily, you haven't kissed me yet?" he whispered, looking into her grey eyes.

"Do you know?" she retorted, "I don't understand the art of kissing in the least, John?"

"I assure you it is very easily learned. I am quite competent to teach you that, dear."

She flew off to another subject in a way peculiarly her own.

"John, have you told Mrs. Tredennis about me? If so, what did she say? Tell me" imperiously—"and at once. I am curious."

John's dark face flushed.

"Yes, I told her," and paused, and Eily, with mock impatience, said,—

"I am waiting to hear. Was it something very disagreeable; and are you afraid I shall be angry? Allow me to assure you I am too indolent to indulge in passion of any sort."

"She said," he began slowly, "I ought to have chosen a wife whose birth and standing were not superior to my own; she even recommended one to me as industrious and economical."

Eily burst into a perfect ripple of laughter.

"John, I am neither; suppose you let me go, and marry the other woman?" Then seriously, "was that all Mrs. Tredennis said about me? Ah! I see by your face it was not, but if it pains you to disclose the rest I'll not wish it; only, John, in future remember you are not to talk of my superior birth and standing. It is nonsense, I was born to my position; you have raised yourself to it, consequently I am inferior to you as having done nothing."

"I am afraid that is sophistry; but what a way you have of comforting a man and making him think better of himself. Eily, my darling, do you know how long I have loved you?"

"No!" toyed with a button on his coat; "will you tell me?" her face flushing more deeply.

"Ever since you came home from school, but then I had no hope of winning you."

"Why, John, you have loved me five

years!" with a pretty, surprised air; "I was only sixteen then."

"I used to walk by the Myrtles often," he continued, "in the mere hope of seeing you; and when you went to town I left as though the best part of me had gone from me. Your six months of absence seemed an eternity to me, and I had no means of knowing when you would return. I wondered, too, if you would never have been changed."

"And did I not lifting her eyes to his passionate darkness. "It so, was the change in improvement?" and then she suddenly cast an arch glance at him through her lashes.

"You were changed, but not as I feared you would be. You were more womanly in ways and speech, but just the same kind, good girl as when you left Moreland. All the six months you were away I used to torture myself with the idea you would return the promised wife of a man who would be more worthy of you than I. Was there no one who loved you there?"

The soft colour faded from her face, but she looked up steadily into his eyes—"Why do you ask that? Did you hear any rumours about me, John? Did the Merchant conspire tally with me?"

"For a moment a denial trembled on her lips, but the next she said frankly, "Yes, John, it was true, but he sinned, and I sent him away. I have not seen him since; I never wish to see him again. Are you angry with me, John?"

"She did not speak.

"No, my darling, no. I was thinking that you could never have loved the man, if for one sin you sent him away; if you had loved him you would have forgiven him many sins."

"Still think so," she said, almost passionately; then laughed at her own earnestness.

"John, you are so dreadfully serious, yourself you will soon teach me to be the same, and you know I am nothing if not frivolous."

"I don't wish you to change; but I am afraid you will often find me a very dull companion. I wonder if you will ever grow tired of me, Eily, and wish you had married that first man?"

"No," with a shake of her head, "I shall never wish that. You are so good, so unselfish, you give me a sense of rest and peace; you make me experience such passionate gratitude that, that sometimes I could cry of it, although I am distinctly not a melancholy or weeping woman. John, I am going to confess further. I have been an arrant flirt; I have loved to trifling with men—are you afraid to trust me? Why, even now I may be playing with you."

"But you are not," he interrupted quickly, and taking her hands he drew them about his neck; "and if you do not love me so dearly as I love you, yet you care for me very much, or you would not have given yourself to me. Now I want to talk to you of our future."

But Eily said, with a low laugh "Who was the woman Mrs. Tredennis recommended to you?"

"It is hardly fair to tell you," gravely; and the girl asked quickly, "was she like Barks is of old, 'willing'?" Oh! I know by your face that she was. John, you can't wear a mask for a moment."

"I don't think I can; but Eily, why do you fly off at a tangent when I mention our future?"

"Simply because I am not prepared to talk of it now. Oh! I have found a wife for you, John—your cousin Lucy. Do you like the idea? She is not too young, in industrious, economical, and has quite a reputation for steadiness; her one drawback is her temper; judging from her usual expression I should say she is slightly acid in temperament."

"What a tease you are, Eily; you know as well as I, that if you are not my wife I shall never marry; that it is only for your sake I prize my wealth; that it is for your sake, and in the hope of winning you, I have toiled and thought year in and year out."

The mischief died out of the grey eyes—a softer expression came over the girl's face. "John," she whispered, "I am not, I never have been worthy of this great love; talk to me as you wish, I will be good for the remainder of the evening. There," in a lighter tone, as if ashamed of her warmth; "make the most of my goodness, it won't last long; to-morrow I shall tease again."

He bent to kiss her before she spoke, and when he released her lips she asked almost abruptly. "You will not say I must call on your mother and cousin—the latter regarding so aggressively that I am positively afraid of her; I know she is not nice."

"You shall in all things please yourself, my darling. Now I am going to take advantage of your goodness," with a smile, "and intend discussing plans for the future, which you so easily ignore. Do you like Grove House, Eily?"

"Yes, very much; but that is an innocent question," with a surprised look in her eyes.

"Indeed, no!" laughing. "It is lonely and I thought if you liked the place, I would buy it. Do you think it would satisfy you? It wants repairing and all that sort of thing—" but Eily interrupted him with something like a sob in her voice,—

"John, John, you are more good to me than I deserve."

"That is impossible; but Eily, dear, you think you could be happy there?" and the look in her eyes answered him; so with his arms about her he went on, "I have thought too, Eily, that it is necessary you should have a carriage, and if there is anything more you wish for you must tell me."

But she broke out with piteous passion, "I cannot take all these things from your hands; you give me too much, and I give you nothing—noting in return. I have not been accustomed to such luxury; I will not have it now. Oh, John! you burden me with your gifts and goodness!"

He only drew her closer and smiled as he kissed her. "Dear, you must not refuse—remember, it will always be my chiefest pleasure to study your wishes, to supply your wants."

There were tears in her eyes as she answered "Don't make me feel my poverty, my unworthiness too keenly. John, I want to be entirely frank with you. I don't love you as you do me; but I will try with all my heart to do so, because you are so good to me, so unlike other men in your unselfishness," and of her own will she put her arms about his neck, and drew his head down until his face touched hers. "I want to make you happy, dear."

And he said earnestly, "You have already done that; but when will you come to me for life, darling?"

With hidden face she answered, "I will come whenever you ask me, John," and a great tumultuous joy filled his heart, and lit his dark eyes.

"Let it be in August, dear. Oh! Eily, how glad a thing your life shall be."

"John, in a whisper, "shall you ever fall in your lover-like obsessions when—when we are married? I have seen always that when folks have been married a little while the husband no longer seeks his wife's society *only*, no longer caresses and makes much of her. Will you grow like that? It would not be pleasant if you did—because I like to be made much of;" and for a moment she lifted her eyes to his dark face bending over her.

"I shall never change," emphatically.

"Your happiness shall be my one aim." She was silent a moment, then a ripple of amusement crossed her face. "Do you know, it was only yesterday that Allie and I,

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something of a husband's chivalry. A man and his wife came to the kissing-gate between two fields; the husband passed through first, and swung the gate to, walking on with superb indifference as to whether the wife followed or no. Shall you ever be like that, John?"

"Of course I shall," laughing; "once married I shall leave you to take care of yourself."

Then he began to talk eagerly of the future, which they would share together, with never a dash of distrust or anger between them, and time sped by on golden wings. It was not until Eily remarked that it was late, he realised how long he had been with her.

"You must go now!" she said, with that guilty, impetuous gesture so familiar to him now; "surely you have been here long enough to satisfy even you?" as he lingered and seemed loth to go. She rose and stood by him, his arm about her waist. "Go now; we are very early folks!"

"Eily," he asked, with an effort, "did you love that man you told me of to-night?"

Just a slight decrease of colour that John did not see, because he waited her answer so anxiously. "I thought I did," gravely and firmly; "but now I suppose it was only a ghastly fancy. Why did you ask?"

"Because, much as I love you, barren as my life would be without you, if there is another you love better than ever you can see me, I will not hold you bound by your promise to me. Remember always, my darling, that to give you joy I would forego all my hopes, all my dreams!"

She clung about him, her heart stirred to its deepest depths by his unselfish devotion; and though she tried to speak, she could frame no words; but he felt the clasp of her hands, the quiet throbbing of her heart, and whispered with a glad conviction that it was so. "Are you content with me?"

She looked up then, and though her face was pale, her eyes glowed with gratitude and admiration. "More than content, John. Oh! make me to be worthy of you."

An hour later she sat in her room talking with her sister, who was lying on a couch, regarding her with curious, criticising eyes. Eily's hair was loose about her shoulders, and in her pale, blue peignoir she looked pretty and childlike; she paused in her occupation of brushing her hair and turned to look at Allie. "Your congratulations seem very faint and cold; I think you don't approve the step I have taken!"

"I am afraid I cannot. Of course, John Tredennis is very rich, and in manners a gentleman; but—his birth, Eily—you should have remembered that."

"With you good birth covers a multitude of sins; with me the case is very different."

"What will Aunt Maitland say when she hears of your engagement? I am sure she will be angry!"

Eily laughed lightly. "Her anger will not affect me; and, in a matter of this kind, no one but the man and woman is concerned—no one has a right to interfere between them."

"Have you really forgotten your first love?" Allie asked, lifting herself on her elbow to look at Eily.

The young girl's face paled a little, but she answered steadily, "Whether I have or not I don't intend speaking or thinking of him. It is doing John a deliberate wrong; please remember this!"

"I think some of your notions are very absurd, Eily; who but yourself would have jilted Roland? He only sinned as many other men have sinned; why should he not win forgiveness?"

"The ill-taste of your remark must be apparent to yourself; now I will say no more of him."

"Very well," huffily; "I suppose you don't object to discussing Mrs. Tredennis, your future mother."

"Don't sneer, Allie," Eily said, lightly;

"I am quite ready to discuss her now and at any time."

"Aren't you frightened when you think of her? What will your friends say of her?"

"In all probability, they will never meet her. I have told John plainly he must not expect me to frequent her house, or that she shall become a daily visitor at mine."

"You are calm in your way. I should have thought you would have left such unpleasant things to discuss after marriage; John might have objected taking you on such terms."

"My dear Allie," earnestly; "I wish to be perfectly open with John; I do not wish him to marry me in a state of ignorance as to my plans for the future; and, remember, I marry him, not his family. Oh!" breaking into a smile, "I don't think I could 'cotton' to Lucy, as the Americans would say. John tells me she is only twenty-six, and she looks forty."

"I think, my dear, I would rather not be you," Allie said, consolingly; "his mother and cousin will certainly make mischief between you, and you'll wish yourself Eily Donner again."

"I refuse to believe I shall ever regret this step; and John is not likely to change."

"I'm glad you are so sure of him. Do you love him, Eily? Come, confess the truth, to me at least!"

Eily passed her with steady eyes and grave, sweet face. "I like him very, very much; I am intensely grateful to him, and I admire his truth and unselfishness; liking, gratitude, and admiration won't make a bad foundation to build conjugal happiness upon. Perhaps some day (oh! with all my heart I hope this) I shall love him as he loves me," and when she paused Allie said, almost cynically,

"That sounds very well, but if John Tredennis had been a poor man would you have married him then?"

"If he had asked me (which I doubt) I should have said yes. Allie, I am tired of myself, so weary of feeling myself lonely and unloved—because you see you always were father's favourite; and if either of you care greatly for me, you hide your love well. I am glad that John loves me; he gives me a sense of comfort and rest I find in no one else—and I do not think I shall be a bad wife, or make him ever unhappy," to all of which Allie listened with wonderful calmness; and when Eily had finished she rose, shook out her dress, and said:—

"Well, I am tired, so will wish you good-night, and I only hope you won't regret this step!"

Eily, finding herself alone, unlocked a desk, and taking from it a small packet of letters and a portrait of a man laid them before her. She was strongly tempted to read the letters through for the last time, to kiss the pictured face, but she told herself it would be wronging John Tredennis, and resolutely resisted the inclination. She pulled down the chandelier, and holding the letters one by one watched them burn in the gas; lastly, she took the portrait, and her hands trembled like a leaf; her face grew ghastly and looked old, and her breath came fast as the flame leapt about and destroyed it. Soon the only tokens of her past life lay at her feet in a charred and blackened mass. The sight seemed to break her pride, and she threw herself face downwards on her bed and sobbed piteously. "Oh! love, love!" and again "Poor John! poor John! if I could forget—oh! teach me to forget!"

A few days later John told her he had purchased Grove House, and soon the preparations for the wedding went on merrily; and, despite sneers and scoffs at home, John Tredennis was a very happy man. As each day passed Eily grew more kind, more gracious, and he told himself at last he was loved even as he loved her. Mrs. Maitland came down to Mereland and reasoned with her niece, tried to persuade her to change her decision, but Eily only answered steadily, "John loves me and I shall keep my word," and Mr.

Donner, who saw what good things the marriage would bring his daughter, became her ally, so that Mrs. Maitland went away offended. Allie had described John's mother graphically to her aunt, so at parting she asked Eily, "if Mrs. Tredennis presents herself at Grove House when you are entertaining, what will you do?"

To which Eily answered with new, sweet dignity, "I should receive her as John's mother, nor forget for a moment that I am a lady!"

CHAPTER II.

May had again come round, and John and Eily were no longer bride and bridegroom, for they had been married in the previous August as had been arranged. They were staying at Ridewell (a small place twenty miles from Mereland) as the guests of a certain Mr. and Mrs. Lesturgeon, a young married couple.

Eily was just the same mischievous, laughing, fascinating Eily as in the days when John first knew and loved her, and he was as lover-like in ways and speech as when first he wooed her. Even Allie Donner was compelled to confess they were a model couple, and Mrs. Lesturgeon's guests all vied in making much of them.

It was a lovely warm day towards the close of May, and Eily sat with her hostess in a shady nook of the garden. Mrs. Lesturgeon was busy with a piece of embroidery; Eily sat with loosely clasped hands listening to her flow of words.

"We are to have another arrival this evening. I hope you will like him, as he is a favourite with us."

"Oh! it is a gentleman! Describe him; you are rather good at that sort of thing."

"Thank you, Eily. Well, he is tall and broad-shouldered—a regular Hercules, with fair hair and moustache and deep violet eyes, and, added to his other charms, he is rich—awfully rich—and has a pretty, romantic name with which his title of captain agrees well. How do you think Captain Roland Staines sounds, dear?" holding her embroidery in a better light.

White as snow was Eily's face, and her eyes grew dark with sudden fear and anguish. She put up one hand to screen herself from Mrs. Lesturgeon's glance, and then said, in an unsteady voice,—

"It is a pretty name, and I have often heard it. I used to know Captain Staines very well; but when I knew him he was not rich, and seemed to have no expectation of ever being so."

"Oh! his money came from a most unexpected quarter, I believe. I wonder he doesn't marry now. They say, too, some girl jilted him, and he still clings to her memory."

"What unfashionable constancy!" and Eily's voice sounded harsh and discordant. "I quite wish to see him again; your words have roused my curiosity." Then she lay back for a few moments, and tried vainly to bring the colour to her cheeks again and the smile to her lips. Presently Mrs. Lesturgeon looked up.

"How white you are, my dear! Are you ill?"

And Eily, rising, answered,—

"I am not very well. If you will excuse me I will go back to the house."

"Shall I come with you?" with kindly anxiety in tone and manner.

"No, no, thank you; it is not necessary. I think the heat has been too great for me. I shall soon be my usual self," and she went with slow steps to the house and up to her own room. There she sat down upon her bed and buried her face in the pillows, whilst a cry rose in her dull heart.

"I cannot meet him! I cannot meet him!" Then she tried to think of John, of all his goodness, love and generosity. She looked at her wedding-ring, and, kissing it, prayed maternally she might yet come to love him as he

deserved. One by one the slow tears trickled down her cheeks and fell upon her clasped hands, whilst all the light had gone from her eyes, and her lips were tremulous. Long she sat thinking of the past and all that lay between her and it, and she wondered in a dull way if it could be her duty to tell her husband what Roland Staines had been to her.

Then she thought of his grieved look when he should hear her story, thought of all the pain he would suffer, and determined to keep her secret safe. She would only tell him that once—ah! so long ago it seemed!—she had known Roland—they had, in fact, been friends; but as she thought thus the first dinner-bell rang, and she, springing up, began to dress hastily.

Presently John came in, and taking her face between his hands, he said, anxiously,—

"Eily, what is the matter? You have been crying."

"Yes, I have been very stupid. I felt over-weary and not very well, and indulged in the feminine luxury of tears. I don't often do that, so you must forgive me, dear."

"I am afraid," very gravely, "you are far from well. Shall I excuse you to Mrs. Lesturgeon? You are unfit to go down."

But Eily laughed.

"Oh, I am better now, dear; and do you suppose, John, I should allow you to go down by yourself? By the way, I have some news for you; a very old acquaintance of mine is expected to arrive this evening—Captain Staines. I met him at my Aunt Maitland's, and she looked steadily into his eyes as she spoke.

"I shall be pleased to meet any friend of yours," John said, putting his arm about her, and kissing her upturned face. "Love, we are very happy!"

"Yes," clinging to him more than ever now that other love was so soon coming, and her heart was heavy with scarcely defined fear.

"You have nothing left to wish for, Eily?" and she answered, softly,—

"Nothing; your goodness to me makes that impossible. Oh! my dear husband, how much I owe you!" and when he saw her eyes were full of tears he shook her playfully.

"Come, little wife, I won't have you spoil your looks. Captain Staines will think you have made an unhappy marriage, and will be calling me out."

But Roland Staines did not arrive until the following morning, and John was out walking with Eily, so Mrs. Lesturgeon lured him into the garden, talking gaily and pleasantly the whole while.

"I have a friend of yours staying here now," she said, as they drew near a girl in a pink dress.

"A friend of mine?" questioningly. "Who is it, please? I am not good at guessing."

"Mrs. Tredennis," and she laughed at his puzzled look. "Are you going to say you don't remember her? That is hardly gallant. You are the first man I ever knew forget her."

"I positively don't remember the name," pulling his tawny moustache in perplexity. "What was her maiden name? That may recall her to my mind."

"I shall not tell you," with an arch smile. "You must guess. Now let me introduce you to Miss Anderson; she is a nice girl and an heiress."

The captain looked lugubrious.

"Is this another design upon my young affections? Positively, my dear Mrs. Lesturgeon, I am afraid of you," with a comical expression in his eyes.

But the little lady hurried him ruthlessly to the girl in pink, and an introduction was gone through; then the hostess hastened away, and the captain was constrained to sit beside Miss Anderson, who did not appear averse to the arrangement.

"Do you know many of the people here?" she asked, lifting a pair of bright hazel eyes to him.

"Not one, with the exception of our host and hostess; oh and a certain Mrs. Tre-

dennis, of whom I haven't the faintest recollection, but Mrs. Lesturgeon says she is an old friend of mine, so I suppose it is all right."

"Oh! if you have ever met Mrs. Tredennis, you could not forget her. She haunts one."

"That is what Mrs. Lesturgeon said. Tell me about the lady in question. Is she young and pretty?"

"She is young, but not what I call pretty. If you stay to criticise her features you won't find one perfect one, and yet all the men and most of the women rave about her. She has a way of seeming pretty, is very clever, fascinating, lively, and is much sought after. Her husband is a complete contrast to her, tall, grave, dark; a gentleman in carriage and speech, but not by birth."

"I am more than ever certain Mrs. Lesturgeon is mistaken; no part of your story is familiar to me, but it interests me, and you will find me a very willing and attentive listener."

"Well, I believe they are greatly attached each to the other, though I can never think what induced her to marry him; perhaps the fascinating Mrs. Tredennis was less artless than she seems, and took her suitor's wealth into consideration. However that may be, they seem mutually satisfied, and he is very proud of her; they say she is the belle of her native place; do you know it—Mereland? It is only twenty miles from Ridewell."

Just the merest change in the Captain's voice and face as he said,—

"I have heard of it, often, and think now I know who the lady in question is. Was her name Eily Donner?"

"Yes; as you do know her, is it impertinent to ask if you think her so very, very pretty?"

"It is so long since I saw her that I hardly dare venture an opinion. I met her at her aunt's, and I believe she made quite a sensation that season. Most folks called her pretty."

Miss Anderson looked disappointed, but she brightened again when the Captain asked in an interested tone,—

"Who is Mr. Tredennis?"

"A self-made man; quite of the people, you know. He owns a coal wharf, and is looked upon as a millionaire; but Mrs. Maitland was very angry when Eily Donner married him. Captain Staines, they are now coming into the grounds. Do you think she has altered since you saw her?"

"Not much," quietly. "How surprised she will be to meet me here."

"Oh! no. Mrs. Lesturgeon told her yesterday you were expected, and she at once recognised your name as that of an old acquaintance. She is not looking well this morning," as Eily drew nearer, and she saw how white her face was. She spoke rapidly to John, and then they came forward together.

Captain Staines rose and advanced to meet them.

Eily extended the tips of her fingers to him, and then introduced him to her husband, and soon they were all laughing and talking gaily.

"Mrs. Tredennis, you are scarcely altered in the least since I used to meet you."

An almost resentful look leapt into her eyes, but she answered, gaily,—

"I must thank you for the implied compliment. It is my one desire to retain my youthfulness. I've a decided horror of growing old; ask Mr. Tredennis if it isn't so?"

"I need no confirmation of your words," in the same light way. "Most women feel so, but few will confess it." Then drifting into another subject, "I have not yet had time to ask if Miss Donner is well, or if she is still Miss Donner."

"She is well, thanks, and still at home with my father. I must beg you to excuse me now, as I have some letters to write." She rose as she spoke, and John went with her to the house, whilst Miss Anderson, turning to Captain Staines, remarked,—

"You rarely see the husband without the wife, and vice versa. We call them love-birds,"

laughing. "Just now you spoke of Miss Donner, do you know her well?" lifting questioning eyes to the bronzed, handsome face.

"Not so well as Mrs. Tredennis. If I remember rightly she is a very pretty blonde, and I am rather surprised to hear she is yet unmarried; one or two men I knew used to rave about her."

"Ah! yes; but was it not before they knew her? She has had admirers, but I believe she never had lover; she is too cold, too sedate to excite any warmth of feeling, and she appears to take positive pleasure (in her cold way) in giving pain to others, and she does not improve with time."

"I am afraid," Roland said, lazily, "that you are an acutely observant young lady, and can only beg you to be merciful in your summary of me to the next comer. Endow me at least with one virtue?"

Miss Anderson laughed again.

"You need not be afraid, women are always more merciful to men than to their own sex, though why it should be so I am at a loss to imagine. Captain Staines, are you going to the Flower Show to-morrow? It is held in Ridewell Park."

"I have promised to obey Mrs. Lesturgeon in all things; if she commands it I must go."

"It is the first show of the season in this county, and if the day is fine will be enjoyable."

The next day was bright and hot as a July day, and at breakfast John Tredennis, after opening his letters, informed his hostess he must run down to Mereland on business.

That lady exclaimed against such a proceeding.

"Why you can't get back for the show, Eily, persuade him to stay!"

"I shall be glad if you can," the young wife said, turning her face towards John. "Isn't it possible?"

"No, Eily; I am awfully sorry, because I had promised myself the pleasure of taking you there."

"And when may we expect your return, Mr. Tredennis? Eily will be quite distressed without you."

"I shall come by an early train; it reaches Ridewell a little after four, I believe, Mrs. Lesturgeon."

"Then I shall leave the show early so that I am here to meet you," Eily said, quietly; and Miss Anderson wondered at the sudden heavy frown on Captain Staines' brow, and the quick flash in his eyes. She leaned a little towards him and asked,—

"Has anything vexed you? Are we too frivolous for you? I really did not think soldiers were much given to gravity."

Roland smiled.

"Neither are we. Why did you fancy I was vexed? and what did you suppose had vexed me?"

"Oh! I don't know, but for a moment you looked quite terrific. I had serious ideas of exchanging my seat with Mr. Fairburn; if you were not angry you were thinking deeply."

"That is a fault of mine," with mock penitence, "which I must strive to check. There is no time for thought in this nineteenth century; we live too much in a hurry."

Eily walked to the station with John, and sauntered slowly homewards, half afraid lest she should meet Roland Staines; but he was nowhere visible, and she did not see him again until they met at the luncheon-table. It was rather a hurried meal that day, as the girls had to dress for the show, and went to their room as soon as etiquette would allow.

After a somewhat lengthened period they began one by one to join the gentlemen, who were growing impatient of the delay.

Eily and Mrs. Lesturgeon came down together, the former wearing a grey dress with a suggestion of crimson at the throat and waist; she stood a moment leisurely buttoning one long glove, and Mrs. Lesturgeon glancing round saw Roland a little apart from the rest.

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She motioned him to her side.

"Captain Staines, I shall place Mrs. Tredennis under your care. It is rather fortunate Mr. Tredennis was called away, or you would have been one of three."

Roland moved to Eily's side; she had finished struggling with her glove, and now looked up at him, her face a shade paler. He made an almost deprecatory gesture.

"I hope you will find me an efficient if not a brilliant escort," he said, gravely, and then they went out together. He saw that Eily's hands trembled a little as she opened her sun-shade and adjusted it so adroitly that he could not see her face. He tried to find some compunction with which to break the silence but could not, and it was she who spoke first in clear, distinct tones.

"This is very absurd, Captain Staines—our silence, I mean. Cannot we effect a change of escorts? Miss Anderson looks bored by Mr. Fairburn. I like him, and am vain enough to fancy he prefers my society to hers," and Roland wondered at her sudden conventional manner.

"Of course, Mrs. Tredennis; if you wish me to make such an audacious proposal I will do so, though I am afraid Miss Anderson will annihilate me. I fancy she can be very terrible. I am extremely sorry you find me so dull a companion, and will go if you wish it."

"Oh!" she answered, coldly, "I am perfectly indifferent; if you elect to remain with me I have no doubt we shall contrive to live through the afternoon, despite the silence."

And the man's heart cried out to be near her once. She might be cold, scornful, insolent if she chose, but to be with her would compensate him for his pain. He had never hoped to touch her hand or look into her eyes again, and now these golden gifts were his for the taking.

But the effort to avoid drifting into speech of the dead past, the knowledge that Eily was a wife and so put away from him for ever, made his manner constrained and awkward, so that his replies to her light words were often very wide of the mark.

She never once forgot the gulf between them, but she bridged it over so gracefully that Roland was convinced that with her the old love was slain, and John was all in all to her.

Oh! if he could have read her heart, all its wild pain and its revolt against the irony of fate! But she wore her mask well, seemed engrossed with the sights and sounds about her, and once openly regretted John had been called away from her.

The man winced and cried in his soul that he had not deserved this torture, and longed to catch her hands and tell her she had wronged him in the past, that he never had been the wretch she had thought.

But of what avail would his confession be? She did not love him now, and she was a wife.

The long, hot afternoon wore by, and to Roland it seemed that it would never end; but just when the band struck up "Once Again," Eily said,—

"I think I will go back to the house now, Captain Staines. I promised to meet Mr. Tredennis on his return. No, I will not take you from this 'madding crowd.' I can go alone."

But he persisted, and she yielded with a careless grace that had grown upon her since the days when they had met and loved; and, oh! bitter thought, since they had parted—she in intensest scorn, he in anger and wounded love.

In almost utter silence they reached the house, and Eily, pausing on the steps, turned to dismiss him; but a sudden violent storm of passion came upon him and urged him, with relentless force, to speak.

Why should he not clear himself? It would cost her but a passing pang to know all she had made him suffer. She did not love him, and it would be some consolation to him to know she saw him once more upright and

true, not fouled and degraded. He would speak. His voice came hoarsely and hesitatingly on the soft May air; his eyes were wild, and on his brow were great beads of agonising sweat.

"Mrs. Tredennis, I have something to say to you; give me half-an-hour. I won't trouble you again."

They had entered now, and she turning confronted him with proud, calm face and steady eyes.

"Captain Staines, you can have nothing to tell that I should care to hear," her voice clear and cold.

He made a passionate gesture.

"In justice to myself I demand a hearing," and with an imperious look she remembered all too well; he flung open the library door, and without a word she entered. He followed her, and wheeled a chair up for her. She sat down, and raised steady eyes to his; but her face had grown paler, and the hands upon her lap trembled. Roland stood leaning his elbow upon the mantel, looking down at her, whilst his breath came thick and fast, and the heart within him was almost bursting with its love, its madness, and despair.

"Mr. Tredennis will return shortly; I hope you will not detain me long," and her voice did not break.

And in a little alcove, divided from the library by curtains, John Tredennis, wearied out by the business of the day, lay dozing.

"I did not intend to vindicate myself—it seemed foolish, as I should gain nothing by it; but to-day I feel myself incapable of bearing the shame and contumely you have so long made me bear."

"If," said Eily, "you intend rehearsing the past I shall leave you. It is wronging Mr. Tredennis."

"It is not," he answered, fiercely. "What I have to say the whole house might hear, save for one thing, which concerns another's name. You wronged me in the past; it's my right to clear myself."

"I do not see how you can do that, or what it will avail you if you can," coldly and concisely.

"It will at least give me back your esteem, will win for me your pity, which is all I ask. On the morning on which we parted I vowed not to see you again, having learned you could not trust me. I certainly should not have sought you, but fate has thrown us together again, and I will speak."

John Tredennis stirred, yawned a little, and opened his eyes, aroused by a voice which he recognised as Ronald Staines. He half rose in his chair, but another voice smote the silent air clearly and coldly,—

"When we parted you became as one dead to me—the dead do not wake again."

It was Eily who spoke, and John felt bewildered, and still averse to playing the part of eavesdropper; he left his chair and made a forward step. Then something seemed to hold him back, and he stood silent and motionless.

"It does not matter now how I loved you, or what vows of constancy you gave me; all that is past now, Mrs. Tredennis, and I have but my story to tell, then we will each go our ways again."

John's heart throbbed against his side. What did those words mean, "vows of constancy you gave me?"

"I know my conduct looked black to you, as it did to others, but I had not the claim on their trust that I had on yours. In all and through all you should have kept your faith in me—"

"Against the evidence of my own senses?" scornfully, and John heard the rustling of her dress as though she had risen to go.

"Yes. Did I not assure you I would explain all in a short time, but you would not wait? It is true I was seen at theatre and concert, in street and park with another woman—"

"And she a light woman," Eily interrupted, her voice stirred by sudden, violent anger.

"You are right; would to Heaven it was

not so. Mrs. Tredennis, that woman was my sister."

"Oh!" she cried—and John shivered at the anguish in her tone—"are you lying to me now?"

"Upon my honour, no. Sit down Mrs. Tredennis. You will give me your pity, I feel, when you have heard all."

She sat down, and hid her face in her hands, and Roland went on,—

"I can almost find it in my heart to be glad that you so soon forget your love for me; it has saved you much suffering."

She did not speak, did not look up at him, so he went on,—

"I had no brothers, and only one sister, and, as you know already, my father was rector of Islebury, a poor man, and a feeble one. My sister was many years younger than I, and was very beautiful, dark as a Spaniard, and wayward as a spoiled child. Our poverty fretted her, and she grew irritable and exacting, and her conduct was characterised by a levity that caused my father deepest anxiety. It came to his ears that she was periling her good name by foolish flirtations and idle wanderings with men whose society most women shunned. He reasoned with her gently, remembering she never had a mother's guidance. But Margaret, instead of promising amendment, laughed scornfully, and declared her intention to please herself, whoever should suffer through her selfishness. He tried to win her to a better mood by love and forbearance, but she went farther astray, and one day the old housekeeper told him she had been seen walking in the twilight with Lord Kinnaird, a profligate and rōue, who was separated, but not divorced from his wife.

"It almost broke my father's heart. He sent for Margaret, and told her what he had heard, and that it was necessary that she should leave home.

"She begged him then not to send her to my aunt's, promised all that he demanded, and for a few days all seemed to be well. But one morning they woke to find her gone. She left a heartless note behind, saying she was tired of life at the Rectory, and had left it behind her for ever; that she had given herself to her lover, Lord Kinnaird; and it was useless to follow her, because she would never return.

"My father was completely broken down with the anguish of Margaret's dishonour; he took to his bed and never left it again. But he sent for me, and implored me to find Margaret, and bring her back.

"I went to town, there meeting, loving, and winning you. I was guilty there. I should not have spoken to you under such circumstances. When our engagement was yet a new thing I found my sister. How can I tell you this," his face pale with shame, love, and despair. "She had left Lord Kinnaird, or rather he had thrown her off, and she was leading a life of misery and degradation. I implored her to return home. She refused. Nothing seemed to touch her heart, and she constantly eluded my vigilance, until at last I found it needful to accompany her to all her favourite haunts. Of course, such a thing could not be kept secret long, and I knew that it had come to your ears. I saw the growing doubt and fear in your eyes, but could not find it in my heart to divulge Margaret's shame. I was doing my best to persuade her to emigrate. Some friends of ours were going to Canada, and offered to take charge of her; and at last I thought I had won her over to my plan. I told myself when she was once away I would explain all; but that same night we went to Drury Lane, and you were there."

He paused, and there was a silence so great that John feared they would hear his deep breaths.

"You believed the worst, and sent me away. I should not have spoken now but for the fact that my father is dead, and Margaret, too; she died nine months ago, impudent, hard, wayward as she had lived. At the last she refused to go to Canada, and I was

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compelled to take her with me to whatever town I was stationed in. Judge if my life has been an easy or pleasant one. I never meant to speak of this, but the craving to clear myself to you grew upon me until it became a passion. My confession can hurt no one now, save myself, upon whom the shame falls; and if it has won for me your pity—”

“Oh!” she broke out wildly, “forgive—forgive me, if you can!” and there was something in her voice that made John’s face pale, whilst his hands dropped to his side clenched and stiff.

“Heaven knows I did that long ago,” sorrowfully; “perhaps I was wrong to expect so much faith, Mrs. Tredennis. Now that you know all, and can judge what I have borne so long in silence, now that you are happy, you can afford to think kindly of me. They say that he is good to you, and that you are devoted to him heart and soul.”

He looked down at the upturned, ghastly face and streaming eyes, and staggered back at the revelation he saw there.

“No, no,” he cried, with outspread hands; “not that, Eily—not that! I—I thought you had forgotten,” and he turned away from her, a mad horror in his heart.

She rose, and went blindly towards him.

“Oh,” she wailed, and her husband, hearing, shivered, “if you had not told me this! Why have you recalled the past? Why have you shown me my soul? Roland, you must go away after this; when you have read all that I have hidden so long—so long, we cannot meet as acquaintances. For my sake, for his dear sake, go! Oh, if you knew all he has been and is to me, all the love and gifts he has showered upon me—me, so unworthy of it all!”

Roland turned and clasped her hands in his.

“I will go!” he said. “We must never forget what is due to him. I wish I had not crossed your path again; I wish I had not spoken! To-morrow when you come down I shall be gone. Good-bye!”

He lifted her hands and kissed them once, because she was John’s wife he dared not kiss her lips.

“Good-bye!” he said, once more, and shivering away from him, she moaned,—

“Good-bye!” and sank again into her chair.

At the door he paused, looked at her with terrible, regretful yearning, then went out, and she sobbed in a dreadful undertone,—

“Oh, John! John! my good, kind John! Heaven grant you may never know!”

The man in the alcove heard her cry; but he stood still in the same attitude, with a vast despair in his eyes.

“John! John!” she wailed again, and his face worked convulsively.

Then he heard her rise and leave the library, closing the door behind her. A terrible groan broke from his lips. He staggered forward like one struck with mortal sickness, and, falling into his chair, between clenched teeth spoke her name desperately, and threw his hands wildly above his head.

It had come upon him so suddenly, this knowledge that she had never loved him, and he had been so sure of her heart, had lived solely in the atmosphere of what he had deemed her love; it had environed him, breathed into his life until it was his life.

He sat long trying to collect his thoughts, trying pitifully to believe he had misunderstood her words, her tone; but he could not so deceive himself.

He heard light steps and merry voices in the hall, and knew the party had returned from the flower-show. Their gay tones jarred upon his over-strained nerves, and he groaned,—

“I cannot bear these things.”

Then he heard the dinner-bell, but he did not go to dress. He stayed on in his hiding-place, and but one thing was clear to him, and that was—Eily must never know he had learned her secret. It would take from her

all the little joy that remained to her, so he told himself; and he must spare her all pain.

The strong, true, unselfish heart yearned over her with passionate pity, that was almost divine, and the love he bore her seemed but to deepen, despite its hopelessness.

Very late in the evening he leaned out of the window, and heard Eily talking to Miss Anderson in her usual calm way. Her face was a shade paler, and she seemed languid; but there was no sign of agony in her eyes, no trace of suffering left upon her.

“I am concerned about Mr. Tredennis’s long absence,” she said. “I shall fetch my hat and cloak, and go to the station. I can’t rest here.”

Miss Anderson laughed.

“What a model couple you are. I quite envy your happiness.”

“Eily!” John called, and at the sound of his voice she turned, uttered a little cry, and ran back to the house.

Soon her arms were about his neck, whilst she asked,—

“How did you get in unseen? How long have you been here?”

“Some little time. I was tired, and came here to rest; then I heard your voice, and called you.”

“How weary you look!” and she clung almost pitifully to him. “I am afraid you have had a fatiguing day.”

“I have rather,” kissing her gently, and she could not guess his heart was well-nigh broken.

CHAPTER III.

JOHN TREDENNIS and his wife were home again, and it was not long before the Mereland folk began to notice and gossip about the great change in him. Eily was outwardly the same, only with John she was tenderer, showed an almost painful anxiety to please and minister to his wants, and knowing, as he did, from what source these feelings sprang, it touched him to keener pity for her.

He realised what sad compunction she suffered, what efforts she made to forget Roland and turn to him as the one love of her life. He responded to all her attempts to please, lavished all the love of his great heart on her; but he could not appear the same, even to her.

He grew haggard and quieter in his ways and speech, because his grief was always present with him, never lifted a moment from him. In his office he brooded over it; as he walked through the streets it clung about and would not leave him; it seemed sapping away his very life.

Men of business began to attribute his worn look and strange silence to unsuccessful speculations, whilst the women said Eily did not make his home happy or attractive—that her extravagance was ruining him.

Some of the latter reports reached John Tredennis, and brought a sudden flush to his pale, dark cheek, a flash of anger to his eyes. The man who told him was an old friend, who thought he did his duty in acquainting John with what all Mereland was saying.

“Tell all who may speak of this to you that no man ever had a truer wife, a more loving companion than I. My marriage has been a happy one, and my business never so lucrative as now.”

He leaned heavily upon the table as he spoke, and passed one hand wearily over his brow as though in pain, then added slowly and distinctly,

“You may say, too, I am not very well. I think the hot weather tries me.”

But day by day the shadow deepened in his eyes—day by day he told himself the only good thing he could do was to die out of the way, and leave Eily free to marry Roland. It was always of her he thought, and how to shield and save her from fresh woe.

She was quick to notice the change in him, and questioned him anxiously concerning his health, and pressed upon him the necessity of

consulting a doctor, and at last he yielded to her entreaties, although he said,—

“It’s of no use, my darling; but I will go to satisfy you.”

Doctor May said there was very little the matter with him, but he had got into a low way, and unless he roused himself his health might suffer severely. John smiled sadly enough, and went back to Eily. She saw him walking slowly and wearily up the drive, and went to meet him. She locked her hands about his arm and looked up into the kind, worn face with eyes full of pain for him.

“Dear,” she said, “I am afraid you are very ill. You must have rest. Tell me what Doctor May thinks of you.”

He told her word for word, and when he had finished she looked up pale and startled.

“John, why are you so unhappy? Is it that I have disappointed you?” and there came a piteous quaver in her low voice. “Oh, tell me how to please you!”

“My darling, I am not unhappy, and you have left me nothing to desire. It is only an absurdly languid feeling that possesses me. I shall be my old self when the autumn comes again.”

“His old self! Oh, never any more—never any more!” he thought. “Only from her he must hide this thought.”

“Come in, dear,” Eily said, softly, “and lie down. You shall stay with me to-day, and the office must take care of itself.”

She spoke with that pretty shade of command in her voice that had always brought a smile to his lips in the bygone glad days; now it only wrung his heart with an added pang as he thought how sure he had been in those days that he only had her love.

She made him lie down on the couch in her own room, and sitting down by him, said,—

“Now we will have a good day together, and I am ‘not at home’ to all callers.”

The sunlight glinted into the room, and touched her pretty hair, the soft white fingers so busy with a strip of embroidery, touched the soft cheek, and made her look well-nigh odious in her prettiness and youth.

John lay looking at her, all his soul in his eyes, and the faint rays of light that fell upon his face showed what cruel ravages grief and disappointed love had made on it. Suddenly grown conscious of his scrutiny Eily turned to look at him, and the change in him came upon her with a shock. She threw down her work, and knelt by him with her arms about his neck.

“Oh, John! John!” she sobbed, “you are very ill, and I did not see it until now!” and her hot tears fell upon his face.

For one wild moment it was in his heart to tell her all—for one wild moment he hoped she loved him as he had desired; but in the next he spoke quietly, although with unsteady, tremulous voice.

“My darling, I am not ill. You are alarming yourself without cause,” and he kissed away the falling tears. “Why, Eily, little wife, it is not like you to cry!” and, he held her closer.

She hid her face on his shoulder.

“If ever I leave undone anything I should do, if ever there is anything in me that vexes you, tell me, that I may change it. With all my heart I want to make you happy. On, yes, with all my heart! All that I have I love you; but most of all I thank you for your dear love. Sometimes fear comes on me that I show you too little of my gratitude, that I do nothing to repay—”

“Hush! my darling!” steadily enough then, although in his heart rose the cry, “Gratitude, always her gratitude, and oh! Heaven, it is her love I want.”

He lifted her in his arms and made her sit very near to him, and talked in quiet tones till she was calm again. Then he said,—

“Fetch your Tennyson, Eily, and read to me; I intend you should amuse me to-day.”

And glad to please him in anything she hurried away, returning soon with the book.

What fancy made her choose *Enoch Arden*? The sadness of the story stole like a subtle essence through all John's heart and brain as he lay listening with closed eyes, holding one of Eily's hands in his.

She read, in tremulous tones, the tale of Enoch's struggles, woes, and sickness, and when she came to the words,—

"My God has bowed me down to what I am; My grief and solitude have broken me."

John bent his dark face upon her bosom, but made no sign of his anguish; so she came to the closing words,—

"So passed the strong, heroic soul away, And when they buried him the little port Had seldom seen a costlier funeral."

She laid aside the book.

"I will read no more to-day—that was too sad. Let me sit by you and talk to you."

And so she whiled away the long morning with light talk and low laughter, until John dreamt all his past pain had been a delusion, that she did love him, and his heart was glad.

In the afternoon he fell asleep to wake at last with a start and find her beside him, and in the cool of the evening they walked together in the grounds, and John said,—

"This has been one of the happiest days in my life."

And she answered, smiling,—

"We will spend many more like this together."

But at night the cloud fell upon him again, for he woke to hear her murmured prayer, "Oh! make me a true wife to him! Oh! turn my heart to him!" and the old despair stole into his heart, and would leave him not—leave him for a weary while.

Who shall tell what pain he bore in all the weary weeks and months that followed, or how ardently he strove to hide it from Eily?

The summer passed and the autumn came, but John looked worn and old, and past pleasures were no longer pleasures to him.

Late one night, just as he was going to his room, there came a rush of feet and a cry of fire. He paused, and Eily spoke to him from a landing,—

"John, did you hear that shout?"

And before he could answer the hall-bell was violently rung.

John ran down and opened it to face a wild-eyed man.

"Mr. Tredennis, your mother's house is on fire; the engines have not arrived, and we don't know if she is got out, but no one has seen her!"

John caught up a hat.

"I'll come at once," and turned to look at Eily, who, white with fear, had joined him. "My darling good-bye, don't stop me."

The young wife answered with quivering lips,—

"Let me go with you! I cannot stay here, and I am not afraid."

"My dear, you are best at home. I will come back to you as soon as possible."

He stooped and kissed her lips.

She followed him to the door, and her voice fell distinctly on the night air,—

"Take care of yourself, John, for my sake!"

He waved his hand, and vanished in the darkness.

But Eily still stood looking out with a sore fear of coming evil in her heart. Presently she heard rapid steps and startled voices, and knew that the servants were awake, and discussing the fire and its cause.

Oppressed by an awful sense of loneliness she went back to the drawing-room, and walked to and fro in a state bordering on distraction, and longing for John's return.

Meanwhile John had reached the scene of the fire, and the crowd made way for him to pass.

A woman rushed forward and caught his hand. It was Lucy. They had not spoken

since his marriage, but all bitterness and pride were forgotten now.

"Save her, John!" she cried. "Your mother! she is in her room! I was so frightened I did not think of her till I was out myself."

He looked up at his mother's window, round which the flames leapt and roared. It was impossible to hoist a ladder.

"Mother!" he called, and only her piercing screams answered him.

He gave one swift glance round, one loving thought to the sweet young wife he had left; then he went quickly forward. Some one put out a detaining hand.

"Don't go, Mr. Tredennis; it is certain death."

He put aside the friendly hand, and with set, white face entered the burning house. A rush of flames met and almost blinded him as he sprang up the smouldering stairs; his hair was singed, his hands and face burned, but he went on until at last he burst into his mother's room.

She was crouching in a corner, uttering wildest screams, and perfectly helpless in her terror.

"Mother!" he cried, above the hissing and crackling of the flames. "Mother! please Heaven I will save you!"

He caught her in his arms, and made once more for the stairs; the flames had spread, and the volumes of smoke almost suffocated him. The agony he suffered from his burns was almost unbearable, and his eyes smarted and stung horribly; added to this his mother lay a dead weight in his arms, and he had never been a strong man. But he pushed on heroically, and the crowd outside waited with beating hearts, and nerves strung to their highest tension.

At last they saw his tall figure in the doorway. Men shouted, women sobbed, when all in a moment a mass of burning wall fell with an awful crash, hurling both John and his mother to the ground.

Hundreds rushed forward with eager, helping hands, and when they had rescued the bodies a doctor stepped out and waved the people back.

He bent over Mrs. Tredennis.

"Dead," he said, "but he is alive; take him to his home."

Eily waited long for her husband's coming—waited until suspense became torture, until she feared she should go mad with the strange dread in her heart.

She ran upstairs, and catching up her hat and cloak went down again into the cold night air.

The flames were subsiding, but the sky was lurid, and she grew more nervous each step; at last she turned a sharp corner and heard suddenly the measured tramp of feet. With all her body's blood flown to her heart she stood still, and soon she could discern figures carrying something or some one between them. At their head was a solitary figure, which at last she recognized as Doctor May. She darted forward.

"Doctor, tell me what has happened!"

He started violently, then taking her hand laid it on his arm, while the men paused in the shadow.

"My dear Mrs. Tredennis, you must come home," and something in his voice added to her fear.

She drew hastily from him and ran to the men, bent over that prostrate figure and marred face, and threw up her arms with a mad gesture, and a cry of "John, my husband! my dear!"

The hearers shivered as her shriek pierced the night, and one of them said,—

"Doctor, for pity's sake, get her away."

She only shivered, and moaned,—

"John, my dear, my dear!"

And Doctor May, his kindly face full of sympathy, entreated,—

"Come away, poor child."

"Oh!" she wailed, "tell me the truth. He is not dead? He will recover?" and

panted with passionate eyes fixed upon him; and the doctor answered pitifully,—

"He is alive, and I trust we shall save him. Now you must come home. He will need all your care and skill."

That calmed her at once.

"I am going; I shall walk quicker than you. I will go first and prepare for you," and she glided a slight, desolate figure through the dreariness of the night.

So John was carried up to his own room and laid upon the bed; he was still unconscious. The doctor glanced anxiously at Eily, as though he feared some violent demonstration of her grief, but she stood at the head of the bed, white and rigid, with locked hands and set liy.

"I may trust to your composure, madam!" he questioned kindly, and for answer she only bowed.

"I should like to consult with Doctor Bromley. I fear Mr. Tredennis has sustained some internal injury."

Like a ghost she glided from the room, and despatched a servant to Doctor Bromley, with an earnest prayer that he would come at once, then she took up her old position by John.

"You are young and inexperienced in nursing," Dr. May said, pitifully; "you will let me send you a duly-qualified nurse. I think you are not capable of bearing the fatigues attending a sick-room."

Her voice sounded dull and cold as she answered,—

"If it is best for him by all means said one, but I shall not leave him." Her lips quivered then, and he feared she would break down, but in a moment her face resumed its rigidity, her manner its strange composure.

In a little while the other medical man arrived, and looked askance at Eily, and at a sign from him Doctor May said,—

"Mrs. Tredennis, we prefer making the examination in your absence; will you kindly leave us?"

For a moment she hesitated, and seeing this he went on,—

"It might possibly unnerve you and unfit you for your after duties," and obedient as a child she went away.

The examination was short—the result apparently serious; for the medical men glanced at each other over the bed, and shook their heads expressively. Then they spoke in low tones for a few seconds, and Doctor May said,—

"It would be far kinder to tell her at once."

But Doctor Bromley seemed dubious.

"How do you think she will take it? We must have no weeping here. Any excitement would be fatal, and must accelerate the end."

"I know; but you may trust Mrs. Tredennis. She has plenty of moral courage. Those small, bright women, who usually look as if a breath too hard would make them vanish, are almost always most prompt and resolute in times of danger or any real need." He turned as he spoke to find John lying with wide-open eyes fixed wistfully, entreatingly upon him.

"Doctor," he said, faintly, for every word cost him cruel pain, "tell me what my chance is? I, myself, think it a very small one. Tell me the truth. I am not afraid to hear it."

"Tredennis," gently, because he knew and loved the man, "I will not hide your danger from you. There is very little, if any, chance for you, and if there is any friend you wish to see send at once."

"Thank you; but for old friendship sake I think you would not offer me any hope at all. From your face I gather you believe I shall in all probability, last but a few days. Is it not so?"

Doctor May bowed.

A strange smile flickered over the marred face, and almost in a whisper he said, "I am glad," and they thought he meant he should be glad to escape his present agony; but he

thought only of Eily and the possible happiness his death might bring her. He spoke again. "Where is my wife? Have you told her this?"

"No; she knows nothing yet. We sent her from the room, fearing her nerves would not stand the strain of the examination. You would like her to come to you now?"

"Yes, doctor," he said, stretching one burnt hand out to May. "Will you tell her I don't think I could bear to pain her by giving her your verdict?" and though fearing to carry so cruel a message to the young wife, dreading some terrible outcry of anguish, the doctor could not resist the eloquent pleading of those dark eyes, the entreaty in the failing voice. He went out, and found Eily walking to and fro in the corridor. At the sound of his step she turned, and with swift grace joined him.

"Is he conscious?" she asked.

"Yes; and wants you. Stay," as she would have left him, "I have something to say to you before you go to him. Whatever may have been the result of our examination you must maintain perfect calmness."

Something in his tone struck her heart with terrible fear and foreboding. She asked, hoarsely,—

"Are his injuries very, very dangerous? and when he saw the anguish of her face he scarce dared answer.

He was an elderly man, and often during his long practice had dashed fond hopes to the ground, but he had never dreaded doing this so much as now, with Eily's piteous eyes and white face uplifted to his own.

He saw she hung upon his word, regarded it as almost infallible, and so he paused. Her voice came sharper than through her clenched teeth.

"Tell me all, Doctor May. I cannot bear suspense."

Then he said, gently.—

"My poor child, I dare not bid you hope. I am afraid he is beyond our help."

She threw her clasped hands high above her pretty head, and with a terrible, inarticulate cry fell against the wall, moaning in an awful undertone.

Doctor May caught her in his arms.

"My dear," he said, huskily, "we rely upon you for help, and for his sake you must be calm."

In a moment she stood erect.

"I will remember," she said, chokingly; "and now let me go to him."

"Shall I send for Miss Donner, or your father? You should have some friend with you now."

"I want no one," with strange calmness. "I only want to be alone with him. And Doctor May, you need not be afraid to trust me now—tell me how long?" her voice dying away in a whisper.

"I am afraid a few days at most. If possible, keep his mother's death from him; the only chance for him, lies in good nursing and perfect freedom from agitation of any kind. Mind, I don't say recovery, even under the most favourable circumstances, is probable; still it is possible, and we must neglect nothing that may conduce to it."

Without a word she walked to John's room, the doctor following her; she saw her cross swiftly and noiselessly to the bed, and, falling on her knees, heard her say,—

"My darling, I have come!" Then he motioned to Mr. Bromley, and they went out together. There was a long silence, broken only by John's deep and painful breathing. Eily's heart was too sore for words, and John seemed quite content to lie looking at her, as she knelt, a slim, girlish figure by him. But at last he spoke,—

"I shall be a heavy burden to you, sweet heart, but you will not complain, and it will last so short a time."

"Oh!" she said, with a wail. "Don't speak of that, John! You must not, you shall not die. How shall I bear to live without you? You who have encompassed

me with your love and care; why cannot I bear this pain for you? Why am I not dying in your stead?—I who have done nothing wise or good in all my life?" She paused then, fearing to lose all self-control; and John, with a strangely-glad smile, answered her,—

"When I am gone other loves and interests will grow up around you, and teach you not to forget me, but to remember me without any bitter pain. Eily, my darling wife, kiss me."

She bent over him and kissed the true face, laid her lips to his, with a little shuddering sob, catching her breath.—

"Oh, my dear!" with keen remorse, "I have never been a good wife to you. I have never done anything in all my days to repay the debt I owe you."

"Love, you made me very happy. I should like you to remember this when I am gone."

She whispered, with sinking heart, and hidden face, "Has any fault or shortcoming of mine changed you as you have changed in the last few months?" and he answered gently, still desirous to save her pain,—

"My dearest, no!" and she could only thank Heaven that he had been satisfied with her poor affection.

In the morning he seemed, for the first time, to remember his mother, and asked Eily of her, saying that, if possible, he should like to see her.

Eily had learned her lesson well and quickly, and answered, with unchanging colour,—

"My dear, she cannot come; she, too, has sustained serious injuries. Is there anything else you wish?" leaving over him with tender anxiety.

"I think not. Oh, yes! I should like to know that there is peace between us once more."

"John, she understands all now, and is more than content," and he could not guess the hidden meaning of her words, but they satisfied him.

Later on the two medical men came again, and Eily asked if it would not be well to have further advice?

Dr. May said, "If it would be any satisfaction, Mrs. Tredennis, by all means have it; but I am of opinion that nothing further can be done for him."

That same night a physician came from town, and all Merland said that there was no hope for John Tredennis—not all the doctors in the world could save him; and a crowd, quiet and orderly, waited in the road to catch sight of the great man, and hear his verdict from his own lips. There were children and women, to whom John had been good, and who could not speak of his death without tears; there were *employés* who had been happy in his services because of his invariable kindness—all waiting with bated breath to hear the fiat.

But Sir Francis Henniker did not reappear that evening, and the crowd dispersed in a quiet, hopeless way that told its own story.

In the sickroom three men were gathered, and Eily had been excluded. She, poor girl, was kneeling by her own bed, her face hidden in her clasped hands incapable of an articulate prayer; but "her woe's dumbbry" was known to Heaven, and it might be mercy would be shown her—that this love she had prized, yet never at its true value, might yet be spared her.

The long minutes dragged on, and it seemed to her she should go mad of the suspense; and when a maid tapped lightly at her door she started up with a short, sharp cry, and, opening the door, confronted her with wan, drawn face and heavy eyes.

"Sir Francis is waiting you in the drawing-room, ma'am," the girl said; and blind and giddy with pain and fear she went down to him.

The physician's heart had been stirred with pity for this frail-looking woman, who spoke so calmly, despite the anguish in her eyes, and now he went forward and took her hand in his,—

"Mrs. Tredennis, I think I may give you a little hope. According to Doctors Bromley and May there has been some slight change in him since morning. I shall stay until tomorrow midday."

In her passion of gratitude she stooped and kissed his hand, and then lifting her head tried to thank him, and failed, because she struggled fiercely for mastery with her tears.

Sir Francis drew up a chair. "Sit down," he said; "he does not need you yet; he is sleeping." He poured out a glass of wine and made her drink it. "Cry if you will, madam," he said, seeing her efforts for calmness, "it will relieve you, and send you to him in a quieter mood." Then he turned and left her alone; and the pretty brown head sank upon the outstretched arms, whilst she tried to form some words of thanksgiving.

On the morrow Sir Francis left Merland, and those who knew and loved John clung desperately to the faint hope held out to them of his recovery, and spent their days in alternations of joy and despair.

One night Eily and her father sat beside his bed, and Doctor May stood at the foot, looking down upon him. He seemed unusually weak, and they feared he could not live until daybreak.

Once his voice broke the awful silence. "Eily, my dear wife."

She crept a little nearer, and laid her cheek to his.

"What is it, dear heart?" she questioned through her gathering tears; but no answer came, only the fluttering of his breath amidst her curls made her shiver and grow sick at heart.

Suddenly he groaned, and his fingers fell away out of her clasp. She looked up, and seeing him silent, with closed lids, shrieked out that he was dead, and with arms outspread fell across the bed, crying in a passion of anguish. "I was not half good enough to him! I was not half good enough! Oh, John! John! speak to me! Say you forgive me."

Doctor May bent over the still form. "He is not dead—it is a swoon. Take her away." So her father bore her in his arms to her room, she moaning hysterically the while. "Forgive! forgive! I was not half good enough!" Did she love him all unknown to herself? Had she at last found him dear?

It was as Doc'r May said. John had but swooned, and when she had grown calmer they allowed Eily to go to him once more. He was almost too weak for speech, and his eyes looked dull, but he made a gesture of welcome as she sat down beside him.

Day after day she watched with untiring patience and rare devotion, and a new light came into her eyes, and a new tone into her voice, so that her sister watching said, "She loves him," and pitied her, because she feared he could not live.

John himself was utterly hopeless of life; he felt glad indeed to go, because then he would leave Eily free, and, it might be, secure happiness and love to her. In his humility he could not read the secret of the change in her—scarcely even saw it.

One day he spoke, after a long silence, startling her by his words. "Eily, I should like you to send for Roland Staines. I wish to see him. If you tell him I am dying he will not refuse my entreaty."

She thought he wandered in his mind, and answered him soothingly.

He read her thoughts. "I am perfectly conscious of what I say, dear," and then a great yearning came upon him to tell her something of his pain and love, so that when he was dead she would deal him the grace of tender pity. "It is of you," he added, "that I would speak; and I must not delay for your sake, lest my strength fail me."

"Of me?" she questioned, standing a little apart, her face flushed red, and her eyes wide open with dread. "What have I to do with Roland Staines?" and trembled as she spoke.

John saw these things, and thought them

signs of conscious love, and tried to feel no pang because her heart had never been his.

"Come to me, love!" he whispered, and she went and knelt beside him, but could not meet the wistful, eloquent look in the dark eyes she feared would soon be closed for ever.

"I am sending for Staines to give him a sacred charge, dear. I am dying, and I cannot bear to leave you alone in the world, and those who should have loved you have always been hard to you. I did not know Staines long or well, but I liked him, and I wish to commit you to his care."

He felt her tremble under his hand, and heard her breath come fast, but could not see her face.

"I am not sorry to die now, but glad, because by going I shall insure your happiness. Whatever I may say you will not be offended, seeing my words are those of a dying man?" And still she could not speak, but sobbed lowly as if her heart were breaking; and the voice that had grown dear went on: "So, sweetheart, I leave you to the man you love and have always loved." There he paused, and all suddenly she cried out,—

"You kill me with your goodness. But, ah! do not, do not send for Roland! Oh! what a wretched wife I have been! Now I have shown you what most I strove to hide! Now I know why you have changed. Oh! I have wrought you nothing but misery, misery! Did I hide my wretched story so ill that you could read it in my eyes? Let me tell you all now, as I ought to have done long, long ago. I am not so vile as you think," and there she stayed her with tender hand laid on her bowed head.

"Love," he said, "I had meant to die without speaking, but my strength has failed me, and even if it is selfish I must tell you all. Do you remember the day of the Ridewell flower-show? I had returned to Mereland in the morning to transact some important business."

"I remember," she said, not looking up, and with a dim presentiment of what she should hear.

"Well, I got away by an earlier train than I had expected, and when I reached the Lesurgeons it was scarcely four. I was hot and tired, and went into the library to rest. You remember the alcove there? It looked so cool and inviting that I sauntered in, and in a short time fell into a dose. I was awakened by voices—they were yours and Captain Staines."

"Forgive me," she breaks in passionately; "I had wronged him, but for your sake I should not have listened to his explanation. It was not wise; it was not wisely," with bitter self-reproach; and a terrible dread that she had lost all his love by her own fault, and just as it had grown precious to her.

John interrupted almost wearily,—

"You were not wrong there. A chance should be given every man to clear himself of a false charge, and as you loved him you would fain know him innocent. I did not mean to listen; I am perfectly aware some would say I played a despicable part, but, upon my honour, I could not speak or move; I heard all that passed between you, and before Staines guessed it knew you still loved him. I heard it in your voice. Oh! dear wife, it came on me with a terrible shock. I knew, and had always known, I was not worthy you; but I believed you loved me, although you never wittingly deceived me by word or look. You were the truest and best of wives, the dearest of all companions, and even in that first hour of my awakening I think my most prominent thought was 'I have made her suffer through my love.' I remembered all your goodness; how, during our wedded life, you had never spoken one hasty or unkind word; how full you had been of quick sympathies and loving interest in all my plans; how you tried to understand business terms and business ways, so that you might be perfect as my companion. But your kindness and affection only could not content me. I thirsted for your whole

heart, and that I had failed to win, so life grew bitter and wearisome to me; and though, for your sake, I strove to appear the same I was conscious of a great change in myself, and I know you saw it, and were grieved. Ah! my dear, my heart smote me often that I had not made your lot a pleasant one, and I was always pondering how to make you happy. I never dreamed you could forget—I never hoped that some day you would turn to me, and your pain was as death to me."

"Oh!" she cried; "you kill me with your goodness. I have never deserved it—never in all my days."

"I saw, though no other did, that after your interview with Roland Staines you suffered much, being torn this way by love and pity for him, that way by duty, affection (and curiously enough), gratitude to me. What had I done that you should be grateful? By what act of grace had I won your affection when your heart was his? Ah! love, it will soon be ended now; and when I am gone, after a reasonable time Roland will come to you and recompense you for past sorrow. You will remember it was my dying wish that he should make you his wife, because so you will be happy. Now, Eily, sweetheart, write him to come."

But she said, lifting her face at last,—

"No, no! I have no wish to see him again, no longer any desire for his love. Oh, John! husband! my dear, my dear! I am most miserable, in that I have lost your love. This fear of losing you has shown me my heart; and if by a life of submission of pain I could win back what once I did not prize, I should be the happiest creature on Heaven's earth. Oh! my dear, my dear! speak kindly to me, and bid me hope! Give me the blessed thought that some day I shall win forgiveness, and your love again!" and her grey eyes were drowned in bitter tears, so that she could not see the sudden flash of joy in his, the tremulous happiness that smote his face with a sudden glory.

"Eily!" he said in a whisper, because love was so great that life grew faint with its excess, "say it again, that you love me. Wife, wife, say it again."

"I love you! I love you! with all my breath, with all my being. I am your wife, not in name only, but in heart now. Say I have not entirely killed the passion once you had for me; say, too—"

But he bowed over her and kissed her upturned face, her tender mouth.

"You are more to me now than ever!" he said. "Oh! love, we will be glad. How can I die and leave you?—oh, for life in which to love you," and she answered faintly through tears that now were happy.—

"Surely Heaven will be good to us and spare us to each other," and bowed her head upon his breast.

The next day the medical men were surprised at the change in John—knew not what cause to attribute it to—but they said it was marvellous. He was as one given back from the dead, for lately they had despaired of his life. Day by day he gathered strength and brightness, and soon visitors were admitted to his room, and amongst them came Lucy.

Eily had warned her to say nothing of her aunt's death, but with returning strength John had grown very solicitous of her health and welfare, and so pressed his cousin with many questions.

She was a hard, matter-of-fact woman, without tact, and she grew confused; and suddenly, to Eily's dismay, told the whole sad story, not softening a detail.

Eily ran to him, and put her arms about him, kissed him, and showed her love in a hundred pretty feminine ways; but the shock had been great, and retarded his recovery for many days, yet Eily's love bore him through it, and Eily's nursing accomplished great things.

So in the late autumn they went to Nice, and under the genial influence of that warmer

climate John recovered all his lost strength, until the only signs of his terrible ordeal was a large scar across the brow, and a similar scar on the palm of his right hand. They stayed at Nice until the coming of April; then John said he had led an idle life too long, and without him the wharf would go to ruin. So to Eily's joy they returned to Mereland, and The Grove seemed a changed place because it was full of love and light laughter, and men spoke of husband and wife as the happiest married couple of their acquaintance.

Almost the first visitor John received on his return was his cousin Lucy. He shook hands cordially with her, and would have called Eily in to join them, but Lucy forbade that.

"I came to see you," she said; "not your wife. I do not love her; but you may tell her for the happiness she has given you I thank her, and am not ungrateful. I shall not see her any more, neither shall I see you unless you want me, and that isn't likely. I am going away for good."

A painful scene ensued. In vain he tried to combat her wishes. She stood her ground firmly, and in the morning she left Mereland never to return but once, and then it would be to say farewell for ever.

So she passed out of John's life, though not from his thoughts; and now and again she would write a bald, commonplace letter saying she was well and comfortable, that the work was not hard, and the wages were good.

Later, when John sent her word that a son had been born to him, she replied "she hoped it would increase his happiness, but children were a sore trouble and expense, and a very doubtful blessing;" that "she sent him a dress made by her own hands, but if they thought it unworthy of acceptance she should not be offended, as possible it was presumption to offer it."

John smiled pitifully, and Eily said nothing of what she thought, because Lucy was her husband's relative, and she would not pain him through her.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE years came and went, and it was again early summer, and John Tredennis, with his wife, had once more accepted Mrs. Lesturgeon's urgent invitation to visit her; she added, as an inducement, that the house was nearly empty, and would be so for at least a fortnight; further she urged that Master Tredennis should accompany his parents, as her little Flossie was lonely, and both children would be better for society of their own age. How vividly Eily recalled the previous visit and contrasted its pain and darkness with her present happiness and love. She put her arms about John's neck, and kissed him before she spoke. He ruffled her pretty hair and asked caressingly, "Well, little wife, what is it?"

"I want to know," half timidly, "if you really wish to go to Ridewell—if the idea is pleasant to you—because if in your mind there lingers any unhappy associations with the place we will not go, and I will write to decline May's invite."

"You will do nothing of the kind," drawing her down upon his knee. "I shall be glad to go. Why pussy, if we had not known sadness we should not rightly appreciate present joy; and what grief can touch me whilst I have your love, little woman? Let us go, by all means, Eily."

So a few days after they arrived at Ridewell, and were met by Mrs. Lesturgeon and her little girl, a small copy of herself.

I am glad you've come Eily," she exclaimed, shaking hands; "and how well you look! Mr. Tredennis, you're more than welcome. Why, what has Eily done to you since last we met?" as her eyes met his so full of content.

"Do I look very woebegone?" John laughed;

"that's the fruit of marriage. You've no idea what a turnagant she is; Mrs. Lesturgeon. I actually go in fear of my life; and peace may be a lovely thing, but it is unknown to me."

"You have cultivated a gift of nonsense," his hostess said, with her pretty smile; "you used to be such an extremely grave personage I stand in awe of you once."

"Which implies you don't now; I shall come to believe the hackneyed saying, 'Family breads contempt.' I have found it so in *Erin*'s case; she actually dares board me in my den; invades my office, insists that I shall accompany her on pleasure jaunts when I'm so pressed with business I am half crazy; and I dare not refuse her slightest wish!"

"I have asked an old friend down to meet you," Mrs. Lesturgeon said, flying off to another subject in her usual rapid way. "I thought it would be a pleasant surprise for both, and render your visit more agreeable. He will be here to-morrow, I believe."

"The?" John laughed. "Then it is a man; and I warn you I am a very 'Bluebeard' for jealousy."

"Stupid!" Eily said; "he was not jealous, only he had a fancy that variety was charming; and so put each wife out of the way as soon as he felt symptoms of weariness coming on. But May, who is our friend?"

"Roland Staines!" stooping to adjust her little girl's hat, and so missing the glance that passed between husband and wife, "I hope my plan to please you has succeeded?"

"Couldn't be anything better," John said mirthily. "He's a very good fellow, and I'm sure Eily was delighted at it," and talking gaily he screened his wife from observation. "When they were once more alone she turned to him, "John," pitifully, all her anxious soul in her eyes, "did you trust me fully? Can you see me withdraw without experiencing a fear of my love for you?"

"Of course I can, sweetheart; if I were not so sure of your heart, should I be the happy fellow I am? But I am sorry for Staines; it's very rough upon him, and has been from the first."

"Yes," softly; "but if all had gone well with him I should never have known your love, which is dearer to me now than my very life," and with that she drew down his true face and kissed it.

Roland Staines arrived the following day, and met Eily with some confusion of manner, but this quickly passed; only when her child ran to him and looked up at him with great, searching eyes, he caught him in his arms, and holding there, while his breath came in great gasps, which frightened little Jack. "Is you ill, poor man?" he questioned; and slipping from him, soon forgot him in his frolic with Miss Lesturgeon.

That evening Roland found himself in a distant part of the garden, with only Eily for his only companion. "You are very happy," he said gravely, meeting her clear eyes with a steady look.

"Very," she answered with sweet solemnity, "Heaven has been very good to me." Then quickly, as if afraid of her own words, "one day I hope to hear you are happily married."

"I shall not marry, but knowing your bliss I am content. Your husband is devoted to you."

"Ah, yes! I do not wish to recall any past pain to you, but I want you to understand all John's goodness to me, and that you cannot do unless I refer to one scene in our lives. Captain Staines, when you explained your conduct to me in the library my husband was in the alcove, and overheard all that passed between us. But he kept his secret, was kinder to me if possible than before, never by word or look reproached me, maintained perfect silence as to the cause of the change I saw in him, until he lay on what he supposed to be his death-bed. Then he told me all, not that he might cast blame upon me, or make me wretched, but because the love he had for me—the yearning to show what great tender-

ness he had lavished upon me—cried out in his heart, and forced him to speech. In that hour, when I learned how justly dear he was to me, when I feared that I had forfeited and lost his love for ever, he treated me with fondest consideration. Ah! if I did not love him what a guilty wretch I should be! I should expect the very stones in the streets to cry shame on my ingratitude."

"You are right," Roland said, although his grave face grew sterner with his pain. "John Tredennick deserves all the love and devotion you can give him!"

Mrs. Lesturgeon sailed up to them at this point:

"Captain Staines, Miss Bancroft has promised to run down for a few days!"

"Then I promise you I shall run off!" Roland responded, with a laugh. "I know what trap you are laying for me. Like the doll's-dressmaker of Dickensian creation, 'I know your tricks and your manners;' and when I cannot fight successfully against them shall save myself by flight!"

Mrs. Lesturgeon spread out her little hands in despair.

"He's a most unsatisfactory creature, Eily, and so ungrateful. He's always disappointing me and frustrating my plans. How many nice girls have I presented to you?"

"Don't know, Mrs. Lesturgeon; according to you they are all nice."

"And some of them were heiresses!"

"Couldn't I take the gold without the lady?"

"Oh, you mercenary creature! I thought soldiers never cared much for money? There was Miss Anderson (you remember her, Eily), handsome and accomplished; she would have made you a good wife! Then there was Bertha Arliss, as amiable as she was pretty——"

"Pray spare me!" pleaded the Captain; "and in future leave me to my bachelor freedom. I like it!"

"Then you are a heathen!"

Two years later Lucy went down to Moreland to say "good-bye."

She had left her situation, and was about to emigrate to New Zealand. She was to go with a family she had long known, and one of whose members wished to marry her.

When Master Jack ran into the room where she was sitting, waiting for John and Eily, who were out, she caught him in her arms and looked passionately into his eyes, and crying, "You have her face, but your eyes are his!" kissed him again and again; and afterwards, when the baby, a toddling, fair-haired mite was lifted to her, could find no room in her heart for her, because she had nothing of her father in her look or features.

She was made very welcome, but at evening she would go; and when she reached the summit of a little hill she turned to look back.

"There is Eily!" said John, who was with her.

"How pretty she is!" she sighed, and, waving her hand, walked on.

And that was the last time she saw John's wife.

[THE END.]

FACETIA.

EXTINQUISHED "SPARKS" THAT OCCASIONALLY FLARE UP.—Husbands.

A BURGLAR having been frightened away by a young lady, her father wanted to know how she did it. "Did you threaten to shoot the rascal?" he asked. "No, pa; I looked daggers at him," she replied.

A PRUDENT man had his portrait painted recently. His friend complained to him that it was much too old. "That's what I ordered," said he. "It will save the expense of another one ten years from now."

"Oh! professor," exclaimed sentimental old Mrs. Fishwhacker, during a private organ-recital in her new music-room, "do pull out that sweet *aria* stop once more!"

An illiterate publican wrote over his door, "Bear sold here." "He spells that word quite correctly," said Theodore Hook, "if he means to apprise us that the article is of his own Bruin."

At some country house where a dramatic piece founded on "Ivanhoe" was to be performed, Lord Alvanley was requested to play the part of Isaac of York. He declined saying "I could never do a Jew in my life."

"But if I put my money in the savings bank, inquire one son of Erin to another, 'when can I draw it out again?' " "Och," replied his friend, "sure an' if you put it in to-day, you can draw it out again to-morrow by giving a fortnight's notice."

The fashion reporters state that "bustles have been revived." This shows the forgiving disposition of the ladies, who consent to making friends with something that, as the popular expression has it, always goes back on 'em.

PREPARED FOR A STORM.—A few nights ago Mr. Bodkin, who had been out taking his glass and pipe, on going home late borrowed an umbrella, and when his wife's tongue was loosened he sat up in bed and suddenly spread it out. "What are you doing with that thing?" said she. "Why, my dear," he gravely answered, "I expected a very heavy storm to-night, and so came prepared."

LAW AND EQUITY.—"Pray, my lord," said a gentleman to a rather whimsical judge, "what is the distinction between law and equity courts?" "Very little in the end," replied his lordship. "They only differ so far as time is concerned. At common law you are done for at once; in equity you are not so easily disposed of. The one is prudic acid; the other is laudanum."

"P.A., I read in the paper that another bank had closed its doors. What does that mean?" asked a boy of his father. "It means, my son, that the cashier has run off with all the money." "But if they close the doors, and the cashier returned and wanted to put the money back where he got it, he couldn't get in, could he, pa?" "My child, I did not think it was possible for a boy of your size to know so little about cashiers."

EVENING STARS.

IT IS better to be wrong once in a while than never to venture an opinion.

Stop the phiddle, and the dancing stops. This shows how little sense there is in dancing, and how much there is in the old phiddle.

A cynic is like a toothless old bull, "tartar—allwuss growling, but never biting."

A man is allwuss well dressed whose clothes don't make him feel nor act awkward.

An eccentricity of enny kind is a fungus and a man should take no more pride in it than he would in a seed wort on the end of his nose.

Edukashun makes the man. Even honesty is improved by edukashun.

Those who read the Bible to understand it, and those who read it to misunderstand, both generally find what they are looking for.

Let us git heed to our doubts—they are wizer than we are.

I never could see enny poetry, nor angel visits, in dreams. I kan trace most ov mi dreams to late hot pork chop suppers and champagne charlies.

Mankind don't seem to be very happy unless they are being cheated. If others won't cheat them, they will lead a hand and cheat themselves.

Wisdom haz allwuss been in few hands, and allwuss will be. The grata mass are opposed to learning enny thing either from their own experience or the experience ov others.—Josh Billings.

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SOCIETY.

The Countess of Dufferin held her first drawing-room at Calcutta with great ceremony. Her ladyship wore on the occasion a petticoat of lace, with bodice and train of satin-merveilleux, set off with diamonds, and a garland of the same precious stones.

A MARRIAGE is arranged between Viscount Sherbrooke and Miss Sneyd, daughter of the late Mr. Sneyd, of Ashcombe, Staffordshire. This lady for some time past has acted as amanuensis to the dowager Viscountess, whose health is very defective. The marriage is to take place shortly.

The Crown Prince and Princess of Austria will start on tour at the end of March. They go first on a visit to the Archduchess Maria at Munich; thence they proceed to Brussels to celebrate the birthday of the King of the Belgians (the Princess's father); from there they start for the Hague, after which they will journey to the East, returning home via Trieste, after visiting Cairo, Smyrna, Greece, and Corfu.

Some of the prettiest bridesmaids' dresses which have been seen for some time were those worn by the six young ladies who attended Miss Beatrice Foster on the occasions of her recent marriage with Mr. G. F. Rods, of Lichfield. These costumes were composed of ruby satin covered with cream lace, and draped with ruby velvet; their bodices were of the same rich material, trimmed with lace, tulle veils, and ruby cigarette. Each wore gold bee pins, the bridegroom's gift. The bride was attired in cream satin-duchesse, with a skirt of Brussels lace ornamented with ostrich feathers and orange blossoms. Brussels lace veil fastened by diamond stars; her two pages were dressed in ruby plush, with Irish lace trimmings.

A very stylish wedding was that of Mr. T. Rice Somerville Lyster, youngest son of Mr. George Foster Lyster, of Gisburne House, Liverpool, with Miss Eva Mariana Ward, second daughter of the late Mr. E. M. Ward, R.A., and Mrs. Ward, of Windsor, which was recently celebrated in St. Michael's Church, Chester-square. The bridesmaids wore costumes of cream embroidered nun's cloth bordered with swansdown, and cream silk bonnets with crystal crowns, and trimmed with small swans, and carried posies of white flowers. The bride was handsomely dressed in bodice and train of cream plush brocade, the main front being covered with Valentine lace caught with sprays of orange blossoms, and she wore a wreath of orange blossoms and tulle veil; ornaments, diamonds and pearls.

Mr. IRVING BLACKBURNE, only son of Col. Irland Blackburne, M.P., of Hale Hall, Lancashire, was married to Miss Georgina Vernon Hume, younger daughter of Colonel Sir Gustavus and Lady Hume, at St. Peter's, Eaton-square, the other day, a large and fashionable congregation witnessing the ceremony. The bride's dress was very elegant, the bodice and train being of white brocaded velvet, over a dress of white satin trimmed with point-lace bounces. She wore a wreath of orange blossoms and Brussels lace veil; and her ornaments were of diamonds and pearls.

A VERY jolly and enjoyable ball is reported to have taken place towards the end of January in the Pavilion at Brighton. Amongst the dresses, a contemporary usually well informed mentions that of Lady Lindsay, who wore a handsome costume of silver-grey with fine diamonds. The diamonds worn by Lady Maxwell, of Calderwood, were also extremely beautiful. Mrs. Bythesea was dressed in black, with old lace and ostrich feathers. The two Misses Pocock were dressed alike in bodices and short trains of silver brocade, with white satin petticoats veiled in tulle, and studded with white butterflies; marabout feathers in the hair, and pearl necklaces; they carried white bouquets.

STATISTICS.

FRENCH POPULATION.—Some interesting statistics have been compiled from the census returns of the population of Paris, taken in 1881. London in 1881 had a population of 3,616,483, but the total number of inhabitants of the French capital is 2,239,928, of whom 1,113,326, are of the male sex, and 1,126,602 female. The population occupies 68,126 dwelling-houses, 32,422 of which are over four stories high. Paris counts 440,022 married men and 446,297 married women. The number of unmarried males is 621,569, as against 1,098,845 in London, and there are only 559,054 spinsters of all ages, as against 1,192,253 in the British capital. The youngest married man in Paris is 17 years old, and the youngest married woman is 14 years old. Of widowers there are 51,735; three of them are 18 years old, and these are almost as many as in London, where there are 58,833; but the widows of London number 173,143, while in Paris there are only 128,251. It is noteworthy that only 348,845 males and 372,576 female Parisians were born in Paris, the majority of the inhabitants of the city having come from the provinces, while 91,872 men and 75,542 women are foreigners.

GEMS.

RIGHT principles benefit a man, even if they do not always seem to suit others.

Poverty is bad enough, but poverty and disgrace are worse.

IGNORANCE gets the experience in this world, and wisdom profits by her lessons.

He who calculates upon difficulties in this life is wise; but he who includes the certainty of defeat also, is a fool.

As a rule, people are never so satisfied with the world and its people, as when tickled by thoughts of their success.

APPARENTLY there is but one hard row to hoe here on earth, and most men imagine that they are working on that row.

If man has any influence for good over others, he need not continually refer to it, yet he should never forget it.

If people were as willing to shield as to expose the faults of others, mutual respect would be increased a hundred per cent.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BREAD CAKE.—Four cups of dough, two cups of sugar, one cup of butter, one cup of milk with two eggs, one teaspoonful of carbonat of soda. Mix with the hands, and add a little flour, also, spices to suit the taste. Let it rise well before baking.

RICE Pudding.—Put enough cold boiled rice in a pudding-dish to fill it half full; put in milk and yolks of eggs to form a custard; set it in the oven, and when it is done, put over the top the whites of the eggs, beaten to a stiff froth, with sugar to make it almost like frosting. Add the juice and grated peel of one lemon; spread this over the pudding smoothly, and let it brown in the oven.

TURKEY HASHED.—Mix some flour with a piece of butter, stir it into some cream and a little veal gravy till it boils up. Cut the turkey in pieces—not too small—put it into the sauce, with grated lemon-peel, white pepper and mace—pounded; a little mushroom-powder or catappa. Simmer it up. Oysters may be added.

BERRY ROLL.—Roll thin a biscuit dough, and cut into squares. Spread over with berries or other fruit; double the crust over and fasten the edges together. Put the rolls into a dripping-pan close together until full, then pat into the pan a little water, sugar and butter. Bake, and serve with any desired pudding sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

STEAM-WORKED TRAMWAYS IN LONDON.—The long-cherished hope of advanced practical minds of seeing tramways within the metropolis now worked by steam is about to be realised after a protracted struggle, and the North London Tramways system will have the credit of inaugurating the reign of common sense in this connection. Seventeen engines have been built by Messrs. Merryweather and Sons for that system, and one of these made its first run on the line on Wednesday evening, January 28.

APPROACHING THE MONARCH.—The right of personally approaching the Monarch is one of the privileges peculiar to the City of London, highly valued, jealously to be preserved. From time immemorial it has been exercised, whether by way of address of congratulation, of remonstrance, or of petition. In these happy times, and during the present reign, citizens have not had occasion to address the Throne other than in terms of hearty congratulation or respectful and sympathetic concordance, but in other times remonstrances and complaints were often made, and with considerable effect.

VASELINE IN PASTRY.—A Paris correspondent writes:—At the recent meeting of the Council of Hygiene of the Department of the Seine, M. Riche, in the name of a commission of medical and sanitary authorities, read a report concerning the practice of using vaseline in pastry as a substitute for butter or fat. Pastry thus prepared can be kept for some time without becoming rancid, a quality advantageous to the seller, and as equally undesirable for the buyer and consumer, who is not warned, either by smell or taste, of the falsification of the ingredients or the staleness of the pastry. Vaseline does not possess the nutritive qualities of either butter or fat, and its action on the digestive apparatus has not been determined, so that it cannot be affirmed that its introduction into articles of food may not be dangerous to health. The Council of Hygiene, therefore, has resolved that it is not desirable that the use of vaseline, petrolaine, or neutraline, and all similar products, in preparing pastry or any other form of food, be permitted in France.—*British Medical Journal*.

ST. CLEMENT'S WELL.—A correspondent writes:—This interesting relic of "Old London" was recently laid bare during the process of removing the rubbish from the western side of the Royal Courts of Justice. The Percy's, in their "History of London," vol. ii, p. 167, state that Clement's Inn, whose history dates back as early as 1470, took its name from "St. Clement's Spring or Well." Under this name it had been known from time immemorial. In Elizabeth's reign, and afterwards, penitents and pilgrims visited this as a holy spot, as well as for rest and refreshment, and the well for healing, and it was customary for the newly-baptised to assemble here at Ascensiontide and Whitsuntide clad in white robes. Fitzstephen, who wrote in the reign of Henry II, speaks of "certain excellent springs whose waters are sweet, salubrious, and clear. Among these Holywell, Clerkenwell, and St. Clement's Well are the principal, as being much the most frequented both by the scholars from the school (Westminster) and the youths from the city when on a summer's evening they are disposed for an airing." Mr. Nightingale, in "The Beauties of England and Wales," published in 1815, says "a pump now covers St. Clement's Well;" and in 1841 it is stated that it flowed as steadily and freshly as ever. The well is said to have been originally 300 feet deep. It is now being rapidly filled up with earth. As it does not appear likely that the spot will ever be built upon, an ornamental fountain would be a fitting memorial to mark the spot where once existed St. Clement's Well, as well as to perpetuate its usefulness.

Feb 28, 1885.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. H.—It is a matter of private agreement.**N. E. T.**—We cannot give the address of either.**LITTLE SAILOR.**—We regret we cannot oblige you.**AVIR.**—Your name is the Latin word for "a bird."**L. S. B.**—A surname may be acquired by reputation.**B. W. D.**—1. We have not seen any notice of it. 2. Your penmanship is very good.**LIMA.**—You write a first-rate business hand—one that is suitable for book-keeping.**CORINNE.**—It is a form of familiarity that no young lady should encourage.**LORA.**—St Augustine, Florida, is the oldest town in the United States.**WILLIAM B. J.**—It depends on the size of the machine.**S. C. E.**—We know of no process that will suit your purpose.**W. B. F.**—A calendar month's notice on either side is necessary.**A. C. L.**—Consult a doctor. We cannot pretend to advise in so difficult and apparently stubborn a case.**ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.**—We are quite unable to recommend any advertised articles.**G. J. W.**—Any music-seller in your own town could supply you.**MAID OF ERIN.**—All depilatories are dangerous, and we cannot recommend them. Try the tweezers.**H. J.**—You had better consult a doctor. Advertised machines of the kind named are risky things to try without proper advice.**JACK.**—The number containing the stamp flirtation in full will be forwarded on receipt of three halfpence in stamps.**GRACE C.**—1. Take plenty of exercise; practise calisthenics and the use of the dumb-bells. 2. See answer to "Jack C."**GEORGE.**—You are quite wrong to trouble yourself so much in the matter. Remain quiet and things are bound to right themselves in the long run.**G. B.**—If the house was let without a written agreement and the landlord has allowed more than six years to accrue without demand he has no remedy.**M. W. G. (Lutterworth).**—We cannot insert the advertisement. You had better put it in one of the newspapers he is in the habit of reading.**G. F. C. T.**—Any degree of cousins may marry. It has long been a disputed point not clearly settled as to whether such marriages are desirable.**ALFRED W.**—There is no royal road to a lady's favour, any more than there is to the study of a science or language.**ALF W.**—Stop talking to her about things which are disagreeable, and show, by your actions, that you have faith in her affection for you.**X. Y. E. (Hull).**—1. It would only be a surgical operation which could help you, and its success would be doubtful. 2. Writing very good indeed; rather scholastic in character.**F. T.**—All you can do is to speak frankly on the subject with your betrothed, and abide by the result. If he loves your sister better than he loves you, it would be an act of folly for you to marry him.**R. M.**—As a matter of courtesy and good feeling, rather than as a matter of right, you should ask the consent of those who have in some degree taken the place of parents to the young lady whom you hope to marry.**CHEV.**—He is evidently a young man of fickle mind, and you have taken the right step to bring him to his bearings. Insist on his keeping his promise of marriage, or else of ceasing his visits to you at once and for ever. He needs decisive treatment.**ISA.**—Some men are so selfish when they are in love that it is almost impossible for them to forego their own wishes, even in the most trifling matters. Your lover seems to be one of that kind. If he is, all you can do is to let him have his own way. Perhaps, after a while, he will get tired of it, if you do not oppose him.**L. D. W.**—Iodoform ointment is the most effective salve to remove the pain of frost-bitten feet, but frost-bitten feet may sanguine, with very serious results, and should have medical treatment. Try all the other hospitals and dispensaries in your town, to see whether you cannot find a doctor conscientious enough to make an examination of your feet before prescribing.**W. M. T.**—When nervous wakefulness ensues at night-time, when there is a desire to sleep, but, on account of a peculiar state of mind and body, rest will not come, inhalation of pure air is a safe and efficient soporific. It is observed in these conditions that a person only breathes half-way, and that the oxygen in the lungs is kept exhausted. A physician recommends a few full respirations as the best remedy for this kind of wakefulness, which is produced frequently by the condition of the atmosphere as well as state of the mind.**AMY G.**—If his letters and yours, taken together, constitute a legal contract, you would be entitled to any damages which you could convince a jury you had sustained by his not keeping the bargain.**ROSINA.**—We agree with you. It seems as if it would take a greater exertion of strength to drag a cart fifty yards, under the circumstances which you mention, than it would to lift a three-hundred pound weight.**H. H. O.**—We have a very poor opinion of a lady who refuses to return gifts under the circumstances you describe, but we have no better opinion of the gentleman who demands them back.**L. L. J.**—The extreme length of the *Great Eastern* is 680 feet, and her breadth, exclusive of paddle-boxes, 82'; inclusive of paddle-boxes, 118'. She is said to be capable of carrying 20,000 tons of coal and freight.**CORALINE J.**—We are inclined to think, with the author of the old adage, that the course of true love never did run smooth. Still, it is possible for lovers to quarrel so often that their love will fade away under their constant wrangling.**AMINA F.**—To fix drawings prepare water starch just as a laundress does, of such a strength as to form a jelly when cold, and then apply one or more thin coats to the drawings with a broad camel hair brush. Then, cold isinglass water or size, or rice water, may be used. Some apply the white of an egg.**R. H. A.**—Take the first opportunity to visit your native town, and press your suit in person. We think that when things come to the point where the lady must refuse or accept you that she will not refuse you. In any case it is better to have the matter settled one way or the other.

TRUE LOVE.

There is true love, and yet you may
Have lingering doubts about it;
I'll tell the truth, and simply say
That life's a blank without it.
There is a love, both true and strong,
A love that falters never;
It lives on faith, and suffers wrong,
But lives and loves for ever.

Such love is found but once on earth—
The heart cannot repeat it;
From whence it comes, or why its birth,
The tongue may never tell it.
This love is mine, in spite of all—
This love I fondly cherish;
The earth may sink, the skies may fall,
This love will never perish.

It is a love that cannot die,
But, like the soul, immortal,
And with it cleaves the starry sky
And passes through the port.
This is the love that comes to stay—
All other loves are fleeting;
And when they come just turn away—
It is but Cupid cheating.

A. C.

A. L. P.—You should at once tell the girl that you love her, and ask her to be your wife. That is undoubtedly what she is waiting for. She has become wearied with your dilatory wooing. Young ladies do not like that sort of thing, especially when they are, to use your sister's phrase, "dead gone" on a young fellow.

CATHIE.—The dealers in feathers and plumes get their supplies through regular channels in such quantities that it is not likely that they would care to go to the trouble of examining and making offers for small lots of wings. Unless you can hear of small dealers who will give a price for wings, it will be hard for you to find a market for them.

L. C. M.—It was, perhaps, hardly "good form" for her to dance so often with her old lover, but ladies do not like to hurt the feelings of their friends by refusing them such favours. You might speak to her about it in a good-natured way, so as to let her know that you did not like it, but in such a manner that her own feelings would not be hurt. That would put her on her guard in the future.

EDWARD H.—It is too late now to try to excuse yourself from keeping your engagement on the plea that you "have no means of finding the girl out." You should not have engaged yourself to her until you knew her well enough to be satisfied with her as your wife. The statement that you cannot correspond with her because there is no post-office within ten miles of her residence is not sound. It is hardly creditable, and besides under the circumstances any girl would send or go ten miles to get a letter from her lover. At any rate, it is your business to write to her, and see whether a correspondence cannot be carried on between you.

E. T. M.—Wide velvet ribbons sewed on any part of the costume to suit the wearer's fancy will often make a plain suit have a very dreary appearance. Inexpensive ribbon with a linen back is quite good enough for this purpose. A deep apron of brown wool may be striped lengthwise by a darker brown velvet ribbon two or three inches wide. These stripes reappear as a vest, and the high collar band and narrow cuffs are covered with velvet. This style of garniture may also be used effectively on light-coloured wool dresses. A tan-coloured cloth dress, trimmed in the manner with black velvet, would be particularly stylish and attractive.

HAL.—We advise you to persevere in your endeavours to get a situation in the department of labour to which you are most inclined.**AN UNFORTUNATE ONE.**—You cannot obtain a divorce on the grounds named, but if you can prove your statements as to the cruelty you can obtain a judicial separation.**LILLIAN.**—Your woman's wit should surely devise a means of bringing your shy lover's courage to a "sticking point." Try a little judicious coquetry. 2. Very good writing.**ANXIOUS ONE.**—You must wait till the gentleman makes further signs himself. As he has gone to live so far away without taking any notice it does not look as if he were deeply impressed.**IRENE MONCREIFF.**—1. The carte is that of a pleasant-looking girl, who writes a capital hand. 2. The meaning of the letter is simply that it is the number of the sheet of the book.**HELEN.**—It would not be at all difficult to learn, by lessons to be taken from a master. The instrument could be obtained by application to any wholesale dealer.**W. E. N.**—1. The steamship *Great Eastern* is 680 feet long, 88 feet wide, 58 feet deep, 28 feet draught, and of 24,000 tons measurement. 2. Rare coins are often disposed of by auction.**AMY.**—1. We can see no impropriety in the matter, especially under the circumstances mentioned; but you must use your own judgment. 2. Consult your sister on the subject. A great deal depends upon the intimacy of the parties.**E. E. S.**—Several derivations are given of the name "Old Tom" applied to girls, and one of the most probable is that it was taken from the Christian name of a gentleman connected with a large house of London dealers.**L. G. W.**—1. No, not if you are particular in your diet, eschewing all very rich, salt, or greasy food. 2. Glycerine diluted with borax water will help to remove blackheads. 3. Your penmanship will answer admirably for an entry clerk.**F. C. P.**—It is an old question in philosophy whether a man is compelled to submit himself to circumstances or whether he can bend circumstances to his will. It is one not ready to be decided, and much depends on the individual case under discussion.**TON.**—For a waterproof varnish for paper try one part dammar resin and six parts acetone digested in a closed flask for two weeks, and the clear solution poured off. To this four parts of collodion are added, and the whole is allowed to clear by standing.**C. H. H.**—Oysters are reported to be good for dyspepsia. They never produce indigestion, and are preferred by invalids when all other food disagrees with them. Raw oysters are used by singers for tonics.**JACK C.**—1. Not unless it contained libellous matter. 2. Consult a physician. 3. Wallflower means fidelity in misfortune, and ivy fidelity, so you may draw your own conclusions. 4. Keep them covered, put them as little in water as possible, and when you wash them use oil instead of soap.**C. C. E.**—Point d'Alençon is merely the old-fashioned herring-bone stitch, with a twist after it, formed by passing the needle under the thread of the last stitch before making another. It is used to connect lines of Point de Venise or Point de Bruxelles, or sometimes to join the edges of braid. Scrap-bags are made in every style and of every kind of material.**P. M. S.**—Unless you are engaged in the business of managing shooting galleries, we do not think your invention would be likely to ever return to you the money required to take out a patent except by expending much time, labour and more money. Besides the fees to the patent office, you would have to pay a patent lawyer to show you how to draw up your claims in such a way as to really protect your invention if it should prove valuable; and when you had your invention patented, your only possible purchasers would be among a class that is neither large nor rich.**THE LONDON READER.** Post-free. Three-half-pence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.**ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES** are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.**NOTICE.**—Part 272, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. XLIV., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.**ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER,** 334, Strand, W.C.**†† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.****London:** Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. Speck; and Printed by Woodfall and Kibbe, Millford Lane, Strand.

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